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OFFICIAL REVIEW OF

JOHN ROBINSON'S

TEN ENORMOUS
SHOWS COMBINED.

4 CIRCUSES IN ONE.
3 MENAGERIES IN ONE.
2 HIPPODROMES IN ONE.

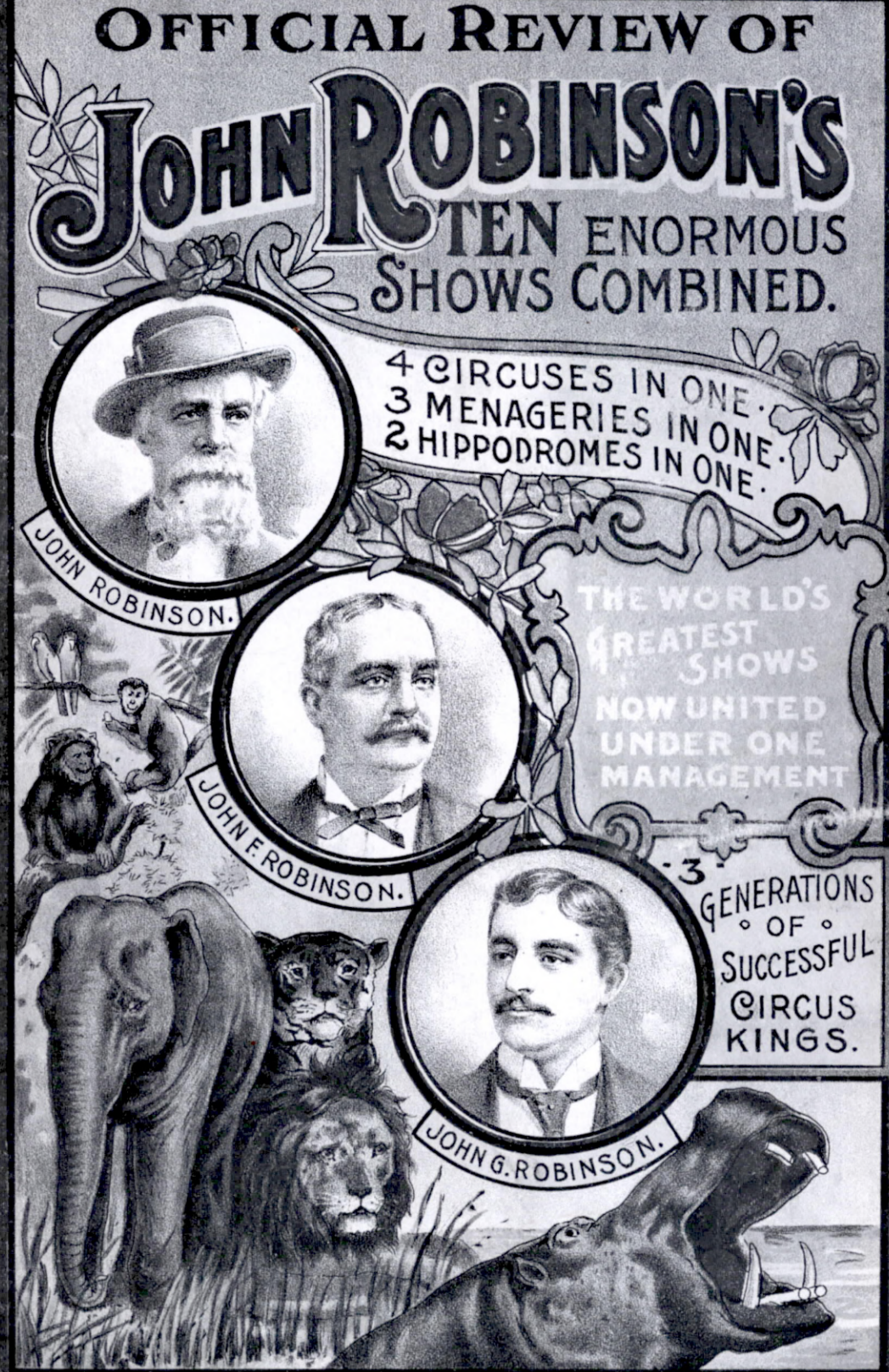
THE WORLD'S
GREATEST
SHOWS
NOW UNITED
UNDER ONE
MANAGEMENT

3
GENERATIONS
OF
SUCCESSFUL
CIRCUS
KINGS.

JOHN ROBINSON.

JOHN F. ROBINSON.

JOHN G. ROBINSON.



BANDWAGON



THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Fred D. Pfening, Jr. Editor

Joseph T. Bradbury and Fred D. Pfening III, Associate Editors

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

One of the most venerable titles in circus history was John Robinson. Operated by the Robinson family of Cincinnati, Ohio almost continuously from 1842 until 1911, the name was used by itself or attached to other famous show titles until 1938, a span of almost a century. Under the direction of John F. Robinson, the show flourished from 1899 until 1911 as a small town show with a great street parade. It was particularly popular in the South. This program dates from 1908, and is in a dull orange, red, and blue. Pfening Archives.

DUES NOTICES MAILED

Dues and subscription notices for the year ending 1984 have been mailed. Please send your payment in the return envelope as soon as possible. If your pay-

ment is not received by July 1, 1983 you will not receive the July-August issue of the *Bandwagon*.

NEW MEMBERS

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2760

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2761

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2762

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1034 NE 128th St., Apt. B
North Miami, Fla. 33161

2379

PLEASE USE NEW CHS APPLICATIONS

If you pass a CHS membership application on to a friend be sure that it is a current one. Dues are currently \$16 per year.

CWM ANNOUNCES ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE

The membership of the Circus World Museum Endowment Committee has been announced by the board of the museum. William L. Schultz, museum director, pointed out that this is the first time the board has appointed a major committee outside its own board membership.

Kenneth W. Haagensen of Oconomowoc, Wis. will serve as Chairman of the Endowment Committee.

Three circus executives are on the committee: Irvin Feld, chairman and owner of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows Inc.; D. R. Miller, owner of the Carson & Barnes Circus; and Alan Slifka, Chairman of the board of the Big Apple Circus.

Three members are Baraboo residents, Merlin Zitzner, James L. Kieffer and Forrest D. Hartman. Haagensen, Kieffer and Mrs. Janet Hartzell, of Grantsbury, Wis., are the three committee members who represent the Historic Sites Foundation Board, the organization that operates the Circus World Museum for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Other committee members are: Paul Ingrassia, Rockford, Ill., official representative of the Circus Fans Association of America; Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Columbus, Ohio, representing the Circus Historical Society; and Tom Parkinson, former circus editor of the *Billboard* and well known author of many books on the circus.

Greg Parkinson of the museum staff will coordinate the entire endowment effort on behalf of the CWM. Parkinson said the purpose of the Library and Research Center Endowment will be to insure the preservation of circus heritage through the support of the Library and Research Center.

The first meeting of the committee was held early in February in Chicago, Ill.

“So if the years are adding up and life sometimes gets a bit on the dull side, tell you what you do; just read this great book and let Bev Kelley wave a magic wand which will make you feel young again.”

— Dr. Norman Vincent Peale
from the foreword to
It Was Better Than Work

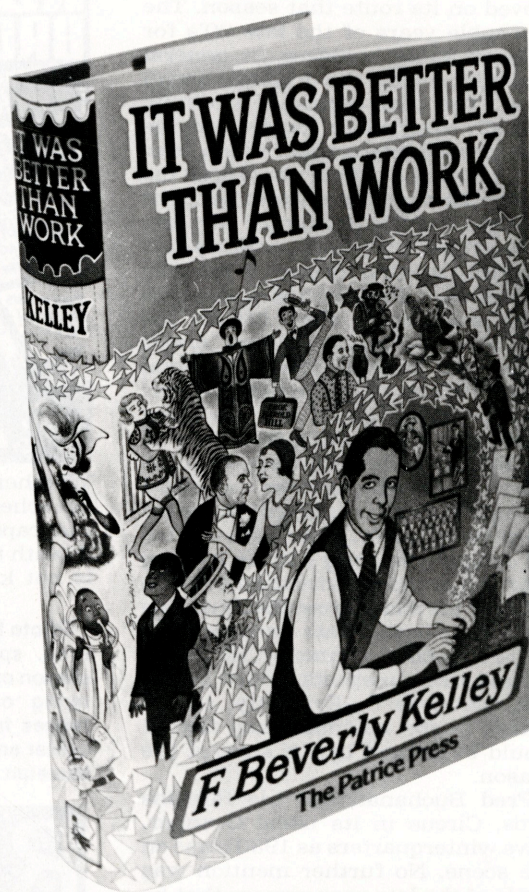
Francis Beverly Kelley, dean of the road-show publicity veterans, give his regards to Broadway and to the Greatest Show in Earth. Here is a valentine laced with fond memories of his old hometown, Delaware, Ohio, where he first caught the bug called Show Biz. He salutes his fellow troupers with affectionate esteem on a sentimental journey through a lively, happy past. Here's the circus, here's the theater, and here's Kelley, who was there!

Bev Kelley is famed first and foremost as a circus publicist. When he retired in 1947 after upwards of 19 years on the tanbark trail, he was head of the crack Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey press corps. At that time the *New York Times* editorialized on “The Passing of a Troubadour.” The *New York Sun* printed a seven-stanza poem to Kelley, composed by one of its editors.

This, however, is more than a circus book. It follows Kelley's dual career as a theatrical publicist. He fronted for the greats — Edward G. Robinson, Ethel Merman, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Judith Anderson, Helen Menken, Forrest Tucker, Cornelia Otis Skinner and a host of others.

Here are chronicled his adventures with the circus — from his loss of the Giraffe-neck Woman in St. Louis's Melbourne Hotel, to the mauling of Maria Rasputin, to the superb press handling in the aftermath of the tragic Hartford fire.

This is a limited edition — mail your order promptly, while copies remain.



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by F. Beverly Kelley:
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the patrice press

The Fred Buchanan Railroad Circuses 1923-31

Robbins Bros. Circus

Part VIII — The 1930 Season

by Joseph T. Bradbury

To tell the story of any circus in 1930 the author must stress the overriding importance of the great depression which had its beginning some ten weeks earlier with the stock market crash and its effect on the show as it moved on its route that season. The profitable years of the late 20's for outdoor show business in general would soon come to a dramatic end in 1930. The poor economic condition virtually everywhere, coupled with the drought and intense heat which later hit much of the nation, would spell the season as one of the worst ever for shows. However, during the very early months of the year most showmen were still looking forward to another great season. Professional economists were predicting a short life for the business downturn and no major voice in the circus world urged caution as the various shows in their winter-quarters prepared for the upcoming 1930 tour. In perusing the pages of the *Billboard* the author spotted only one bit of distressing news that could have foretold the coming disaster for show business. An agent for a theatrical company touring Florida looking over the economic situation prior to booking his show wrote that business conditions in the state were terrible, as he termed it, no money, no activity, and that prospects looked bleak. But that was it. Evidently, to the others in the business they felt all would be normal by the start of the season.

Fred Buchanan had his Robbins Bros. Circus in its usual Granger, Iowa winter-quarters as 1930 came on the scene. No further mention was made of the late year rumors that he would enlarge to 40 cars and/or acquire use of the Forepaugh-Sells title. What Buchanan would do, however, was to put forth the largest and most spectacular street parade of any of his shows, and to frame the strongest and most versatile performance he had ever had.

The circus world read early in the Jan. 4, 1930 *Billboard* an advertisement that the Robbins Circus title was now for rent and those interested were advised to contact Mrs. Frank A. Robbins, 67 Condict Street, Jersey City, N.J. Buchanan had made arrangements with the family of the late circus owner, Frank A. Robbins, to use the title since 1924, and Milton Robbins, his son, had managed the sideshow for a number of seasons.

FRANKFORT
MONDAY, MAY 12
(Season of 1930.)

The Largest Circus in the World Giving Street Parade

ROBBINS BROS. 4 RING CIRCUS

Living Person Shot Through Space from Mouth of Cannon

BUCK OWENS
Famous Moving Picture Star
Direct From **HOLLYWOOD**
With His Hollywood Company

PACIFIC WHALE CO.
Will Exhibit Baby Whale in the Flesh—NOT A SKELETON

30 ELEPHANTS—CAMELS
"BIG BINGO"
Largest Elephant in the World

400 Wild Animals
200 Trained Horses
1000 PEOPLE

TWO MAMMOTH SPECTACLES
MOTHER GOOSE and SANTA CLAUS IN FAIRYLAND
and HISTORIC AMERICA!

MORE PEOPLE—MORE NEW ACTS
More of EVERYTHING Than Ever Before!

TWO SHOWS
2 P.M. and 8 P.M.

Whether or not the fact that Milt was not scheduled to return to the show in that capacity in 1930 had anything to do with this particular advertisement is not known to the author. In any

Photo No. 2 - Litho advertising Robbins Bros. spec, Santa Claus in Fairyland, season of 1930. Color scheme has red lettering outlined in black. Background ranges from blue at the top to white in center and green at bottom. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.

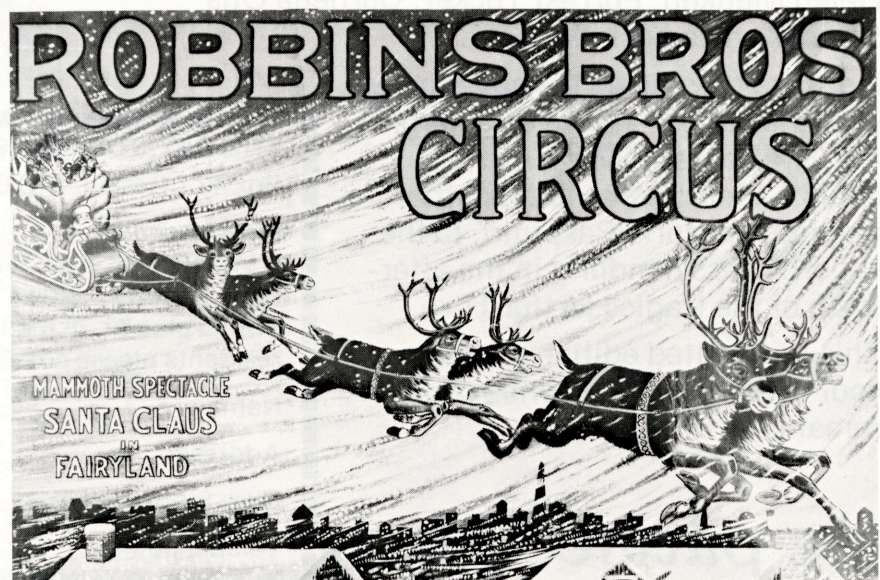


Photo No. 1 - Newspaper ad for Robbins Bros. stand at Frankfort, Ind., May 12, 1930. Pfening Archives.

event Buchanan did acquire use of the Robbins title again for 1930 and nothing else on this matter appeared in the trade publications. Very little was in this first *Billboard* of 1930 concerning the Robbins show other than a few personnel notes which said that Johnny Delmore and Harold Hall had been clowning and Santa Clausing at Sears-Roebuck in Kansas City for the past few weeks. Donald Jackson of the cookhouse and Pete and Buttons, candy butchers of the Robbins show had been working at the convention hall in Kansas City. Also in that town were other troupers on the show last season, Pat Casey, who had charge of the auto show, Walter (Annabelle) Schuyler, impersonator, and Bruce (Blossom) Radcliffe.

The first advertisements of the show came in the Jan. 11, 1930 *Billboard* and read, "Wanted for Advance, Robbins Bros. Circus, Bill Posters, Banner Men, and Lithographers. Address, W.J. Erickson, Winter Quarters, Granger, Ia."

The entire show world lost one of its giants when Jerry Mugivan died on January 22 following a hernia operation. Circus folk, dignitaries and otherwise, descended on Peru, Ind. for the funeral. Although Mugivan and his partners, Bert Bowers and Ed Ballard, had sold all of their American

Circus Corporation holdings to John Ringling back in September 1929, Mugivan was still considered to be most influential in the circus community.

Another Robbins advertisement came in the Feb. 8, 1930 *Billboard* which read, "Wanted Clowns for Robbins Bros. Circus. Have opening for few more clowns, especially stilt-walkers and midgets. State what instrument you play for clown band. Address, Kenneth Waite, Elliott Hotel, Des Moines, Iowa."

It was not until the Feb. 15, 1930 *Billboard* appeared was there any substantial news from the show in Granger. The article was headed, "WORK AT ROBBINS BROS. QUARTERS PROGRESSING" and the text advised that the shops have been making much progress in the work of readying the show's equipment for the new season. Joe Bullington again has the wood shop; Tom Waddell, the blacksmith shop, while Superintendent Ralph Sinnott is lending his personal supervision to the painting and decorating. Other notes said that W.J. Erickson, in charge of the advance, has returned to quarters and expects to remain there until opening time. Owner Fred Buchanan and R.F. and J.A. Schiller had recently attended the Shrine Circus in Minneapolis. Elsewhere in the issue was a letter from O.A. Gilson, bandmaster of the show, who informed that at the Granger quarters Dutch Shultz and his assistant Charles Hagan are putting the elephants through their acts and were breaking some of the young elephants to routines. Also Joe Marvello and Joe Smith are breaking new menage and liberty horse acts. The harness shop is under the direction of Waxey Paul and the cookhouse looked after by O'Neal. Bert Rickman and bandmaster Gilson have been busy working on new specs for the opening and closing of the performance. Gilson concluded by noting that a number of Robbins people are spending the winter at the Elliott Hotel in nearby Des Moines.

Another progress report from the Granger quarters came in the Mar. 1, 1930 *Billboard* which said that all departments were full-handed and everything is progressing nicely. The big tableau wagons have been finished and the cages and floats are almost through the wood and blacksmith shops and are being put through the paint shop. A Showmen's League of Robbins troupers has been organized with headquarters in the Elliott Hotel in Des Moines. A final item said that W.J. Erickson is keeping himself busy superintending the remodeling and finishing of the interior of his new advance car. Gus Karras, former wrestler on the show, but of recent years manager of the

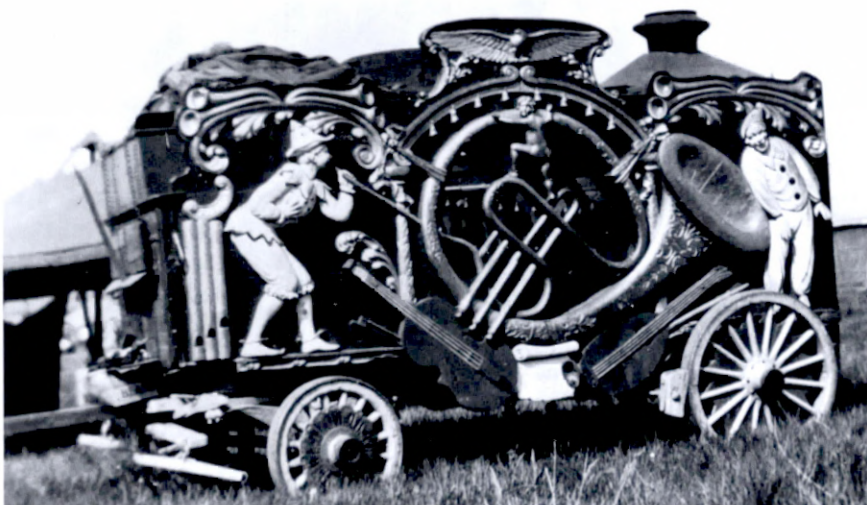
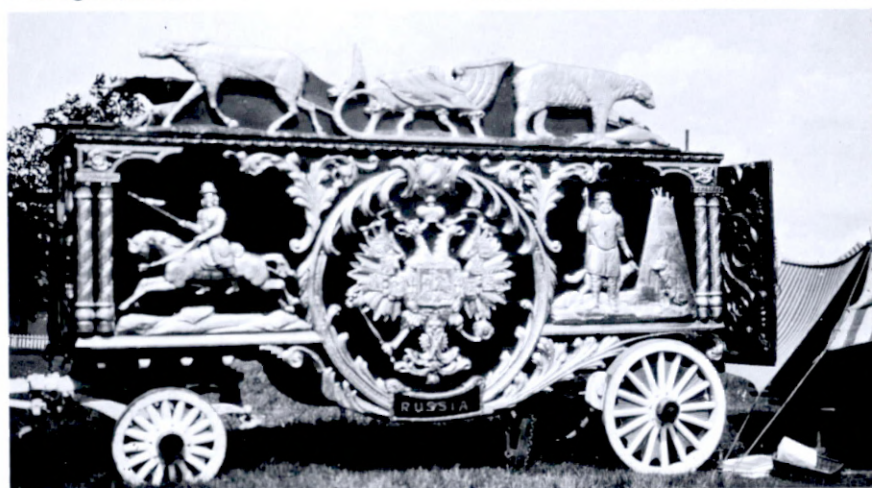


Photo No. 3 - Former Barnum & Bailey steam calliope, Clown and Horn, was used on Robbins Bros. for seasons 1929-31. This shot was taken on the Robbins lot in 1931. Pfening Archives.

cafe, has resumed his wrestling activities during the winter months and has had a busy winter around Chillicothe, Mo. Karras will manage the cafe car again this season.

No other details were given concerning a new advance car. Where it came from or how it looked is not known to the author. The show no doubt needed a more modern car because the one in use at least through 1926 was of the old style, open platform variety. In all probability the new advertising car mentioned in the article was of the closed-in vestibule type in use on virtually all main lines. Unfortunately, no photos picturing this new car have been located.

Photo No. 4 - The former Ringling Bros. Russia Tableau wagon was used on Robbins Bros. for seasons 1930-31. This photo was probably taken at a stand in Indiana in 1930. Gordon M. Potter Collection in Pfening Archives.



The 1930 train consisted of 30 cars (as it did in 1929), 1 advance, 7 stocks, 15 flats, and 7 coaches. One of the coaches was Buchanan's private car titled "Rover" which tradition says was once used by Theodore Roosevelt. When the car was first put into use by Buchanan is not known to the author, but no doubt it had been part of the Robbins train for several years. The car was an open end observation type. No details are available as to the train color scheme for 1930 but probably it was the same as the previous season, orange for stocks and flats and Pullman green for the coaches.

Tableau type wagons used in the 1930 street parade consisted of the Spellman set, United States, Great Britain, France, China, Panama, South America, Belgium, and Africa (often called India or Hippo), plus the Two Hemispheres wagon and a newcomer to the Robbins march, Russia, which Buchanan had purchased from the residue of the 1929 Gentry Bros. Circus (details of this purchase were provided in the 1929 installment). The former Barnum & Bailey pony type floats, Santa Claus, Mother Goose, Old Woman in Shoe, and Cinderella were



Photo No. 5 - Robbins Bros. hippo den built at the Granger, Iowa quarters was used seasons 1929-30. This shot was taken of the wagon parked at the Hall Farm, Lancaster, Mo. about 1932. Pfening Archives.

also present as was the former Yankee Robinson air calliope and Barnum & Bailey Horn and Clown Steam calliope. All of these wagons with exception of the Russia tableau had rolled in the 1929 parade.

The Russia wagon, which tradition says Buchanan bought for only \$50.00 from the Donaldson Lithographing Company which owned the equipment of the 15 car Gentry Bros. 1929 show, was a handsome vehicle and heavily carved. The complete history of the Russia wagon appeared in the Circus Wagon History File by this author in the December 1961 *Bandwagon*. A brief summary is given here. It was built by the Bode Wagon Works of Cincinnati in the winter of 1902-03 on order from Ringling Bros. at the cost of \$1900.00. Other wagons on the same order included the United States, Great Britain, and Germany tableaux and a snake den. The wagon was originally equipped with deep and heavily carved splashboards which caused difficulty in making turns. Modifications had to be made before it performed satisfactorily and tradition has it that the Ringlings were sorely put out with Bode over this defect and in fact never again purchased wagons from that firm. The Russia wagon first appeared on Ringling Bros. in 1903 and continued with the show through the final 1918 season. In 1919 and 1920 it was on the combined Ringling-Barnum show and rolled in the final street parades of that circus.

When parades were eliminated in 1921 the wagon was stored at that show's Bridgeport, Conn. quarters until the winter of 1924-25 when it was sold to Floyd and Howard King for their new Walter L. Main Circus of 1925. In 1926-27-28 the Russia wagon was again on the King's Walter L. Main show and in 1928 and 1929 on

their Gentry Bros. Circus. After Gentry folded in the fall of 1929 the equipment was taken over by the Donaldson Lithographing Co. for debts and sold piecemeal at the former John Robinson and Hagenbeck-Wallace quarters in West Baden, Ind. From there it went to Buchanan and was used for the first time by Robbins Bros. in 1930.

The 1930 elephant herd consisted of the same ten that had been on the show the previous season, Columbia, Ena, Trilby, Big Katie, Big Jennie, Margaret, Blanche, Tony, Vera (Big Bingo), and Little Babe. CHS member Wes Herwig of Randolph Center, Vt. has recently loaned an interesting letter which was in the files of the late Charlie Davis, noted elephant historian, which Wes now owns. The letter which is reproduced here in its entirety was sent to Mr. Davis by John Schultz, Robbins Bros. menagerie superintendent and gives valuable information on the ten elephants in the 1930 Robbins herd. Of special interest is the height, weight, and age of each animal. The age given for some of the older elephants might be suspect but in any event this information came from the man in charge of the herd and written at the time he held that job and the particular age given was that which he felt to be correct. The letter reads as follows:

Granger, Iowa
Mar. 17, 1930

Mr. Davis,

In reply to your letter dated March 12 sent to Mr. Buchanan about the bulls, he has turned it over to me. About the bulls, we have ten of them.

1. Columbia, the oldest is 95 years old, height 8 ft. 6 in., weight 7700 lbs. Female. She was bought from a park in Kansas City, Mo. Also formerly on Forepaugh-Sells show. Name when on that show was 'Victoria.'

2. Vera, the largest we have is 50 years old, height 9 ft. 10 in., weight 8750. Female. She was bought through W.P. Hall of Lancaster, Mo. Formerly of Memphis, Tenn. zoo. Arrived at the zoo in



Photo No. 6 - The former Barnum & Bailey Old Woman in Shoe tableau was sent to the Granger, Iowa quarters in mid-season 1930 when Robbins Bros. reduced size of its train from 30 to 20 cars. Later the wagon was sent from Granger to the Hall Farm, Lancaster, Mo. This shot was taken in Lancaster about 1932. Pfening Archives.

1910 from Ringling Bros. Circus.

3. Blanche. She is 35 years old, height 8 ft. 4 in., weight 7600 lbs. Female. Was bought from Snake King. Arrived in Boston from Hamburg, Germany through Hagenbeck in 1925 and was shipped direct to the show which was playing in Winona, Minn. that day.

4. Ena. She is 45 years old, height 8 ft., weight 7200 lbs. Female. She arrived in the U.S. in 1914 from London, England. Was bought by Selig Zoo in Los Angeles from Bostock Wild Animal Show. Buchanan bought her from Selig in 1921.

5. Trilby. Height 7 ft. 4 in., weight 6000 lbs. Female. Bought in 1924 when show was on the road from W.P. Hall. Age 18.

6. Katy. Height 7 ft., weight 4500 lbs. Age 15. Female.

7. Jennie. Height 7 ft. 8 in., weight 5000 lbs. Age 17, Female.

8. Babe. Height 6 ft. 6 in., weight 4500 lbs. Age 15. Buchanan bought Babe, Katy and Jennie from W.P. Hall in 1925. They arrived in this country in 1923. Trilby also arrived with them.

9. Margaret. Height 5 ft 2 in., weight 2500 lbs. Age 10 years. Female.

10. Tony. Height 5 ft., weight 2700 lbs. Age 9 years. Female. Arrived same time as Blanche.

Respectfully yours,
(signed) John Schultz
Supt. Menagerie
F. Hogan, assistant

Several reports indicated the Robbins menagerie had a goodly number of camels in 1930, one putting the number up to 15 which was probably exaggerated somewhat. No detailed information as to the number of cages

that were carried is available but in all probability it was at or near the peak number for the show during its history, which according to Bill Woodcock Sr. was 15.

The March 15, 1930 *Billboard* had an interesting report on the various routes the railroad circuses were planning during the coming season. This was based on contracts made between the shows and the railroads. It was noted that Robbins Bros. would be heading east through Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. In Ohio the show would cross paths with at least three Ringling owned circuses. In reality Robbins Bros. went no farther east than Ohio, but the article said plans were made to go on into West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York. Even contracts were made with the railroads for movement to some 22 stands in Canada. Whether Buchanan was serious in routing his show this far east and then into Canada is not known to the author. For several years he had indicated he wanted to play some eastern territory with Robbins Bros. He eventually did, but not until 1931. A final item in the *Billboard* report said that when opposition did develop between circuses it would be some of the Ringling owned units squaring off against Robbins Bros. Evidently, Christy Bros., Cole Bros., and the 101 Ranch Wild West Show, the other railers taking to the road in 1930, would head into territory not lined up by Ringling.

For several weeks in February and March there were very few news reports coming from the Robbins show. One short item did say that Walter Powell and Nick Gallucci, wire walkers who were one of the feature acts of the Shrine Circus in Detroit, are contracted to be with Robbins Bros. this season. It will be Powell's second season with the show and Gallucci's seventh.

The March 29, 1930 *Billboard* said that James Shropshire will have the side show with Robbins this season and has contracted a fine lineup of attractions. Homer C. Griffin will head the side show band and minstrel. This article also gave the first real news on the performance to be presented. It advised that highlights in the program will include Gregg's Cannon Act; Teofilo Calvo, Argentine high-wire artist; the DuBelios, wire act; Kato Troupe of Japs, Riding Hobsons, Buck Owens, Micky King, in one-arm swings, and the Flying Concellos. Also it was noted that the show will leave winter quarters with the finest parade and performance it has ever assembled. With ideal spring weather the last three weeks the work in winterquarters has progressed far beyond accomplishments of other years at this time. There were numerous visitors the past Sunday,



Photo No. 8 - Russia tableau wagon on Robbins Bros. lot ready for morning street parade, about 1930. Joe Bradbury (Melvin) Collection.

among them J.A. Wagner, national president of the Circus Fans Association. Other items of interest in the article said that J.R. Harvey, contractor, and P.N. Branson, general agent, were in conference with Fred Buchanan Sunday and Monday, and John Schiller recently arrived in quarters. W.J. Erickson and E.D. Parker are busy finishing the interior of the new advance car. C.M. Godlove was a business visitor last week, completing arrangements for his "whale exhibit" to be featured with the circus. Final notes said that Ed Hirner, who will have the cookhouse, is busy repairing his equipment and Joe Fish, boss hostler, has arrived and is busy getting the stock into shape.

Photo No. 7 - Unidentified Robbins Bros. bandsman standing beside the Belgium tableau, about 1930. Pfening Archives.



CFA President J.A. Wagner of Des Moines told in detail of his visit to the Robbins quarters in Granger as mentioned in the *Billboard* account in the April 1930 issue of *The White Tops*. Headed "PRESIDENT WAGNER VISTIS ROBBINS," the article read as follows:

"I drove out to the winterquarters of Robbins Bros. Circus yesterday. Had a very pleasant visit in the home of Fred Buchanan, the owner. On the way I passed ten 6 horse teams along the roadside harnessed and hitched to their double-trees and tongue. They were making a drive of five miles, the first of the season and indeed it looked mighty circusy. About a mile farther ahead I came upon ten elephants, which were also making a five mile hike, being their first time out this season.

"I found the animals and stock in first class condition, in fact they have come out of the winter in better shape than ever before. The hippo, Miss Iowa, has nearly doubled in size and she is in splendid condition. A strange thing is that in her tank is a chunk of wood and on this she nibbles and chews, which results in keeping her teeth in good condition. Fred told me that when they take the chunk of wood away she is disconsolable as when you take a bone away from a dog.

"In the camel paddock, in which Fred has a large number, those born last spring and now a year old could hardly be recognized, they have grown so. In its stall with its mother was a two-humped baby camel born last week.

"Over two dozen cages and tableau wagons were standing in the yard that had been turned out from the woodwork and paint shop all in bright red and gold colors. A new white ticket wagon has also been completed. New poles and stakes were assembled in orderly manner. A great number of horses were running in the yards surrounding the barns. As I bid Fred goodbye the aroma from the cookhouse told of the approach of the sup-

per hour. From my investigation it looks as if Robbins Bros. Circus would go out this spring bigger and better than ever."

Unfortunately there is no other information on the vehicle President Wagner termed the "new white ticket wagon."

The show's official notice and "Call" advertisement for the season's opener came in the April 12, 1930 *Billboard*. It read: "CALL CALL CALL — Robbins Bros. Circus. 1930 Season opens at Newton, Iowa, Wednesday, April 23. All people engaged report on lot at Newton by 10 A.M., Monday, April 21, unless otherwise notified by letter. Circus train leaves Winter Quarters 6 P.M., April 20. Please acknowledge this call by mail immediately to Granger, Ia. as follows: Big Show Performers, Bert E. Rickman; Big Show Band, O.A. Gilson; Concert People, Buck Owens; Side Show Band, Homer C. Griffin; Side Show Performers, James Shropshire; Ticket Department, L.R. Arnold; Candy Butchers, Frank Becker; Wardrobe, Fred L. Shafer; Big Top Canvas, Ralph Noble; Drivers, Joe Fish; Cook House Men, Edward Hirner; Menagerie Men, John Schultz; Ushers, J.H. Patterson; Property Men, L.J. McNamara; Side Show Canvas, Harry Long; Grooms, Chas. Sheffer; Lights, W.D. Willis; Trainmen, Paul Barton."

The 1930 circus season was now at hand. The most significant aspect was the circus empire of John Ringling which would see six railroad circuses under the control of a single individual ready to take to the road. Ringling's circus empire consisted of Ringling-Barnum, 90 cars; Sells-Floto, 40 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 30 cars; Al G. Barnes, 30 cars; John Robinson, 25 cars; and Sparks, 20 cars, some 235 cars of circus. This phenomenon would occur only one time, in 1930. The following 1931 season would see Ringling's empire reduced both in the number of circuses going on the road as well as cuts in the car totals of those that did go out. Other rail circuses, flat car type, ready to roll in 1930 included Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. on 30 cars; George W. Christy's Christy Bros. on 20 cars; and Floyd King's Cole Bros. on 10 cars. Also going out was the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show on 30 cars and E.H. Jones' three car, gilly type, Cole & Rogers Circus.

Railroad shows parading were Robbins Bros., Christy Bros., Cole Bros., and the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West.

Overland shows, most of them now fully motorized, but a few still moving with a combination of trucks and horse drawn vehicles, hitting the road in 1930 included Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, Gentry Bros., Schell Bros., Hunt's, Walter L. Main, Russell



Photo No. 9 - France tableau wagon in Robbins Bros. street parade, about 1930. Pfening Archives.

Bros., Barnett Bros., Seils-Sterling, M.L. Clark & Sons; LaMont Bros., Ketrow Bros., Orton Bros., Brison Bros., Cook Bros., Al F. Wheeler; Richards Bros., Conroy Bros., O'Neil Bros., Vanderburg Bros., Olinger Bros., Harr Bros., Holly Bros., Robinson Bros., Henry Bros., Rose Killian, Escalante Bros., Coup Bros., Yankee Patterson, Campbell Bros., and Parish Bros. Most of the larger overland shows paraded.

As mentioned before there were no voices of caution coming from the circus world concerning business prospects of the coming season, however the April 12, 1930 *Billboard* sounded an ominous warning of what might lay ahead. It was announced that Ringling-Barnum's attendance was off during its just concluded ten day stand at the New York City Coliseum. The overall stand saw crowds run

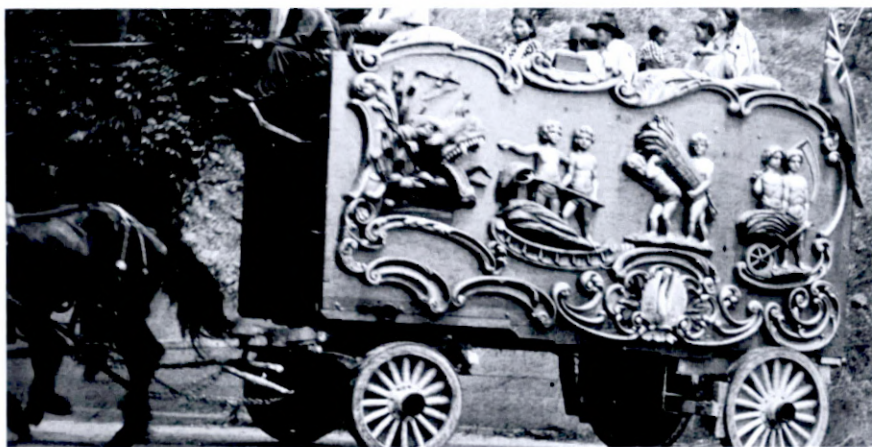
from fair to good but the take was definitely down in comparison to last year. The Big Show was now in Madison Square Garden where matinees had been light for the most part with only a few considered fair. In the evenings only one could be called big. Sells-Floto at the Coliseum in Chicago was getting only fair crowds. Later when Sells-Floto had completed both its Coliseum and Stadium dates in the Windy City the trade publications would term the show's business at both as being poor.

The April 19, 1930 *Billboard* advised that Robbins Bros. would open its season in Newton, Iowa, April 23, and that the show would move into town two days earlier and would conduct its rehearsals there. Also mentioned was that Cliff Gregg, whose act consists of having himself shot out of a cannon, would be in the Robbins performance. A separate Robbins item in the Under the Marquee section said that Fred Buchanan made a business trip to Chicago a few days ago. It noted that Buchanan has a nice outfit this year, probably the best he has ever had, but he's not broadcasting his route.

The May 10, 1930 *Billboard* carried

Photo No. 10 - China tableau wagon in Robbins Bros. street parade, about 1930. Pfening Archives.





the official review of the Robbins opening in an article headed "ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS HAS AUSPICIOUS OPENING. Cliff Gregg, human cannon ball; Buck Owens, Hollywood star; Flying Concello Troupe and Teofilo Calvo among features in program—show offering new spectacle."

"NEWTON, Ia. May 3—The Robbins Bros. Circus opened its seventh annual season here April 23. A mile-long circus pageant of Oriental loveliness with a fine display of wild animals all shown in open dens; gaily caparisoned horses, with beautiful teams of 10 black horses hauling the first red, blue white and gold band wagon, called the United States; music by three bands and two calliopes; cowboys and cowgirls, a band of Sioux Indians, elephants, and camels.

"The tent was comfortably filled at the matinee and Col. Fred Buchanan, sole owner, had one of his famous smiles of triumph on his face. To pick out the best acts would be difficult.

"The program opens with a wonderful new spec, entitled 'Mother Goose in Fairyland,' written by Equestrian Director, Bert Rickman. One of America's best known circus bandmasters and composers, Prof. O.A. Gilson, arranged the fine musical score and wrote the chorus and solo parts. The extravaganza introduces all of the characters from the Mother Goose rhymes and fables. There is a big singing chorus and a large cast of principals, featuring Minnie Atzen, prima donna, and Mildred Gallucci, soprano soloist.

"The Aerial Concello Troupe is seen in a daring flying trapeze act with Arthur doing double twister somersaults blindfolded. The Five Riding Willards appear in a comedy-riding bare-back somersault act. The three herds of trained Robbins Bros. elephants present many new novelties under the guidance of Capt. John Schultz, assisted by Mazie Floto and Alta Mae Niquette. The Imperial Troupe of 10 Arabs do an unusual acrobatic, gym-

Photo No. 11 - Africa tableau (often called India or Hippo) in Robbins Bros. street parade, about 1930. Pfening Archives.

nastic and tumbling act. There are clowns galore and they kept the crowds roaring with laughter all through the show. They are under the direction of Kenneth Waite. The Kato Troupe of Japanese appear in marvelous balancing, juggling and gymnastic acts. Kate and Tom Smith's dogs, monkeys, ponies, with jumping Russian wolfhounds, do a new act that is a decided hit. Mary Rickman and Billy Bedonie do a principal riding act that is a winner. Teofilo Calvo, Argen-

This photo of Fred Buchanan and his friend Jacob A. Wagner was taken on April 23, 1930 at the opening stand in Newton, Iowa. The photo originally appeared in the May 1930 issue of the *White Tops*. Buchanan seldom allowed himself to be photographed.



tine wonder high-wire artiste, is a sensation, standing on his head and doing knee and hand stands on a slack wire 40 feet in the air. Mickey King, billed as 'Queen of the Air,' does an endurance act of 70 rollups in midair while hanging by her right wrist. A high-class menage act of 16 trained high-school horses with their riders is a feature. Walter Powell, 'Wizard of the Silver Wire,' stops the show and causes a sensation with back somersaults and fancy dances on the slender wire. Sixteen winsome young ladies do a butterfly dance in the dome of the tent while hanging by their teeth. Buchanan's own original historic pageant, 'America,' is worth the price of admission alone.

"The outstanding thriller is 'the Human Cannon Ball.' Ivanhoe, one of the original Fearless Greggs, of 'Cliff' Gregg acts, is the athlete in this act. A 40 foot cannon weighing 7,600 pounds is used in this act, which closes the program.

"Fred Buchanan has again shown his business insight into real showmanship when he secured the services of the screen star and cowboy, Buck Owens, of Hollywood, and his leading lady, Anita Austion. He is assisted by 16 cowboys and cowgirls and a band of 20 Sioux Indians.

"Gilson's band plays an unusually fine program of classical, popular, and novelty numbers. (The band roster listed 20 members plus Bud Giess, air calliope player, and L. Ray Choisser, steam calliope).

"With a six-pole big top, a five-pole menagerie and a five-pole kid show of all new canvas, with many flags of all nations and pennants floating in the breeze, the midway and showgrounds presented a truly wonderful sight. The midway is unusually attractive with the side-show banner front of 16 double-decked banners in attractive colors and designs showing the features offered by Manager James Shropshire's annex. His staff includes: Ticket sellers, Jess McBride and Sky Harris; supt. of front door, Pat Casey; inside lecturer, who is also manager of the whale, Captain C.M. Goodlove; magic and punch, Tommy Arenz; mind reader, Madame Elizabeth; Cuban Max, sword swallower and fire eater; Princess Marie, midget doll lady; Helen Willis, Albino; Viola, snakes; Mike Nobel, ladder of swords and singer; Willie Bowleggs, impalement act; Hines Canadian troupe of six Scotch bagpipers, singers and dancers; The Leons, Alpine yodelers, accordion and banjo players; Homer G. Griffin's Alabama orchestra, band and minstrels (total of 15 listed). The inside of the annex top is very attractive in decorations of blue, yellow, and gold. All of the stages are in many Oriental colors of various hues with a background of spangles etc.



Photo No. 12 - Robbins Bros. elephants ready for street parade at Iowa City, Iowa. Date is believed to be April 24, 1930. Joe Rettinger Collection.

"Just off from the entrance to the midway is Frederick (Peggy) Poole's new show called 'Gangland' or 'Does Crime Pay?'. This attraction is in an attractive black and white tent with an all electric sign front and attractive banners. Ticket sellers are Salem Bedonie and Merritt Bigger. Inside lecturer is Red Stewart. Another feature of the midway is Earl Sennott's cafe and restaurant, with Mrs. Earl Sennott, treasurer; Frank Murray, manager, and four waiters. The balloon and novelty concession department is in charge of Thomas Zingaro, assisted by his son, George B. and brother, Florindo A."

On the column opposite the Robbins review was a story that the first of many circus casualties to come in 1930 had occurred when Coup Bros. Circus, which opened at Anson, Texas, closed at Quitague, Texas owing to bad business and lack of funds to keep it going. The show was owned by the Somerset Amusement Inc. of Meyersdale, Pa., a Delaware corporation, J.N. Cover, president and treasurer. E.G. Smith had been the show's road manager.

The May 1930 *White Tops* said that CFA National President, J.A. Wagner and other Iowa CFAs attended the Robbins Bros. opening in Newton. President Wagner noted the show had a brilliant parade with the caliope playing "Happy Days Are Here Again." The performance featured new, novel, difficult, and thrilling acts. Some 5,000 attended the opening matinee.

In his search for the large collection of circus photos the late J.A. Wagner is believed to have accumulated, CHS member and director Joe Rettinger located a few that Wagner took at the Robbins opening at Newton, Ia. in 1930. Unfortunately, the shots are of rather poor photographic quality, however they are of vast historic importance. A few are printed here. Although the *Billboard* review mentioned the Robbins big top as having six center poles the Wagner photos

picture only four. In all probability the big top was of the same size Robbins had used for the last few seasons, 140 ft. round with three 50's.

In the same *Billboard* that carried the Robbins review was another story which said that a claim had been filed against Robbins Bros. in Des Moines Municipal Court for \$380 by the Henry Field Seed Co. of Shenandoah, Iowa, owner of radio station KFNF. The seed company declared it had demanded of Fred and W.T. Buchanan, owners of the circus, payment for radio announcements but that the amount had not been forthcoming. The action was brought because the seed company believed the circus was about to remove its property from the state. The location of the station and date of the claim was not given in the article. Robbins had not played Shenandoah since July 17, 1928 and no doubt the claim went back to then if the radio station had been located in the same town as its owners. No further mention was made of the disposition of the case.

A few weeks after the opener Buchanan announced the following staff and personnel of Robbins Bros. for the 1930 season: Fred Buchanan, owner and general manager; James Morse, who has been legal adjuster with Buchanan for the last ten seasons was temporarily indisposed at his home in Des Moines and Les G. Minger and John Schiller are taking his place; John Schiller, auditor; Les G. Minger, secretary; L. Ray Choisser, supt. of service tax dept.; Charles Meyers, treasurer; Bert Rickman, equestrian director; Lonnie Buchanan, supt. of privileges; Ruddy McPherran, up-town ticket sales manager; James Shropshire, side-show manager; Jess McBride, asst.; O.A. Gilson, bandmaster; Frederick Poole, pit show manager; Kenneth R. Waite, produc-

ing clown; Jake Newman, general agent and traffic manager; P.N. Branson, asst. general agent; J. Russell Harvey and J.D. Baynham, local contracting agents; Will T. Buchanan, general press agent; F. Robert Saul, agent back; E.D. Parker, special agent with a brigade of 12 men; W.J. Erickson, advance car manager with 20 billers, bannermen and lithographers; J. Earl Sennott, geneal supt.; Ralph Noble, supt. of canvas; Joe Fish, boss hostler; Charles Sheffer, ring stock boss; Fred L. Schafer, master of wardrobe; Homer C. Griffin, sideshow bandmaster; Lawrence R. Arnold, big show ticket supt.; Buck Owens, concert dept. manager; Edward Hirner, steward; John Schultz, supt. menagerie; Francis Hogan, asst.; W.D. Willis, chief electrician; Floyd Johnson, blacksmith; Emanuel Mendoza, boss props; L.R. Arnold, supt. tickets; Mose Becker, boss candy butcher.

The ladies dressing room (performers) were: Mary Rickman, Billie Bedonie, Helen Morse, Mazie Floto, Antoinette Concello, Mickey King, Anita Austin, Kate Smith, Beulah Biglow, Minnie Atzen, Hazel Hickey, Juanietta Rogers, Alta Mae Niquette, Irma Lee Niquette, Rosalie Clark, Dolly Jacobs, Faye Seabourn, Ethel Merris, Marcella Merris, Dora Choisser, Mildred Allen, Agnes White, Ada Bliss, Elizabeth Agnew, Bertha Wells and Edith Westfall.

The men's pad room (performers) were: Arthur Concello, George Concello, the Kato Troupe—five Japanese (Tots Koban, Koman Kitamura, Uki Hayakati, D. Sato, and T. Nagami), Zig and Riz, Walter Powell, Tracey Andrews, John Delmar, Chester Sherman, Bill Hill, Harold Hall, Nick Gallucci, Walter Schuyler, John Schafer, Blonda Ward, Slim Wills, Charles Rouss, Robert Gow, Edward N. Schommer, A.C. Biglow, Roy Mapes, Ted Bures, Ken J. Hess, Lewis Span, Myron H. Curtis, Bert Leo, Wallie Hansen, Jake Heller, and Joe Wicker. John Hickey is assistant equestrian director.

Following opening day in Newton the show next played Iowa City, April 24, then crossed over into Illinois for Rock Island, and returned to Iowa for Clinton, Belle Plaine, Ames, Carroll, Harlan, Atlantic, Red Oak, Fairfield and Keokuk. A second trip into Illinois began May 7 at Mommouth and was followed by Princeton, Ottawa, and Joliet.

At Keokuk, May 6, the show was robbed of \$1,600 by armed bandits. According to news reports Charles Meyers, the Robbins treasurer, and W.E. Sinnott, general superintendent, were taking the day receipts to the train safe when their auto was forced to the curb by holdup men armed with pistols and a sub-machine gun. The three bandits then escaped in a big

car. There was nothing further about the robbery in the trade publications.

The May 24, 1930 *Billboard* said that after four days of very bad business in Fairfield and Keokuk, Iowa and Mommouth and Princeton, Illinois Robbins Bros.' turning point for better business came in Ottawa, Ill., May 9, which saw fair attendance at the matinee and a big night crowd. At Joliet, the next day, again there was a large evening crowd following a fair turnout in the afternoon. In Joliet a new lot out on Broadway was used for the first time by any circus. Other notes of interest in the article said that William (Baldy) Ganoe is again superintendent of the front door while Charles Meyers is in charge of the red ticket wagon. Both of these men had been with Buchanan for many seasons. Ray Swain, formerly a theatre manager and manager of the Richard & Pringle Colored Minstrels joined in Fairfield, Iowa to serve as timekeeper and in charge of the reserved seat ticket wagon. New novelty and big numbers are being added constantly by producing clown, Kenneth R. Waite. George Krionderis, wrestler, joined in Red Oak, Iowa, and Gus Karas, wrestler, is now the added attraction in the show's concert. Mrs. Nettie Dill, wife of Sam Dill, owner of the new motorized Gentry Bros. Circus, was a guest of the show at Frankfort, Indiana. Gentry Bros. was showing at Lebanon, Ind. only 17 miles away.

Connersville, Ind., May 13, was one of only two dates in the state as the show moved on eastward into Ohio with the initial stand coming at Middletown which was followed by Circleville, Zanesville, Cambridge, Dover, Newark, Delaware, Findlay, and Defiance.

At Middletown, Ohio, May 14, the circus editor of the *Billboard* paid a visit to the Robbins show. His report came in the May 24, 1930 issue which read as follows:

"ROBBINS SHOW IS VERY GOOD. Business, however, not up to standard, owing to conditions—fine parade given."

"The Robbins Bros. Circus played Middletown, Ohio, last Wednesday, and being close to Cincinnati, the circus editor paid a visit to Fred Buchanan's show in the afternoon, where business was the lightest of the current season."

"The show, like a number of others, has not been getting the business it deserves for the reason that conditions throughout the country are not any too good. If there is any 'big' business to be had this season, the Robbins show should get its share, for it is putting out a big flash of a parade and, in addition, giving the customers their money's worth in a program way. And let it be said that there



Photo No. 13 - Another view of Robbins Bros. elephants ready for street parade at Iowa City, Iowa, probably April 24, 1930. Joe Rettinger Collection.

is nothing of a suggestive nature offered.

"The program, a very pleasing one, is presented in two rings and on a stage. It has two very good specs, in

Photo No. 18 - Robbins Bros. litho posted at San Rafael, Calif., Oct. 4, 1930 advertises Japanese performers. Title is in cream on dark blue background at top. Light cream is used for bottom background. Performers are in red, yellow, blue, and white costumes. Kent Ghirard Collection.



'Mother Goose in Fairyland' and the historic pageant, 'America' both coming in for plenty of applause. A complete review of the show will not be given here inasmuch as this appeared in a recent issue. However, we want to point out several meritorious offerings. The show has a wonderful flying return act in the Concello Troupe, two men and one woman. The catcher is A-1. The male flyer (Art Concello) in addition to doing a fine routing does a double, full-twisting somersault while the woman flyer, (Antoinette Concello) among other things does a double somersault. Then there is Walter Powell, who does back somersaults and fancy dances on the wire, and Teofilo Calvo, high-wire performer, who stands on his head and does knee and hand stands. The wire number brought forth big hands. The Kato Troupe of Japanese appear in some fine balancing, juggling, and gymnastic acts, working in a fast manner. Micky King is scoring with her endurance act of rollups in midair while hanging by her wrist. Buck Owens, the Hollywood star is a feature, as also is Cliff Gregg, who is shot out of a cannon and lands in a net. This is a thrilling closing number.

"Bert Rickman has the performance running smoothly, and O.A. Gilson's band adds materially to the program. He has an excellent musical organization. Some good clown numbers are put on by Kenneth Waite and his gang of funsters."

"There is a good lineup in the sideshow, managed by the veteran, James Shropshire, but business hasn't been anything to brag about."

"Fred Buchanan has a menagerie in keeping with his show. He has quite a large hippopotamus (a fine specimen), 10 bulls, 17 camels, wonderful chimp and many other animals. He also has surrounded himself with a very capable staff of executives and everything moves with alacrity."

At Circleville, Ohio, the following day several of the Robbins Bros. troupers attended the meeting of the



Photo No. 14 - Robbins Bros. on lot at Newton, Iowa, opening day, April 23, 1930. Elephants left to right center are, Bingo (Vera), Ena, Columbia, and Tony. Handlers are not positively identified but it is believed Camel Dutch Narfeski is at left and Tommy Hanny is at right. The big top is in background. Photo by J.A. Wagner (Joe Rettinger Collection).

local Rotary Club. Included were Buck Owens, movie star, Robert Saul, press agent, and Minnie Atzen, singer in the spec. During the evening performance in Circleville, Cliff Gregg, the human cannon ball, suffered serious and painful burns on his right arm caused by a premature explosion while he was preparing for his act. The trade publications didn't say whether or not he missed any performances due to his injury.

Defiance, May 23, was the final date in Ohio and the show returned to Indiana for a single stand at Gary, then moved on to Illinois to play Elgin and Dixon.

A short notice in the May 31, 1930 *Billboard* said that despite a heavy downpour at Dover, Ohio, May 19, Robbins Bros. making its first tour of Ohio, played to a fair crowd at the matinee and near capacity at night. The rain let up soon after the matinee got under way and held off until the show moved on to Newark. The press in Dover was loud in its praise for the Robbins performance. The article concluded with the fact that this circus in giving a parade is winning back the good graces of the small town circus fans as indicated in Dover.

The June 7, 1930 *Billboard* gave good coverage of the show's tour of Ohio and Indiana. It again noted that Dover, Ohio was the big surprise of the week for Robbins Bros. with good attendance in spite of rainy conditions. It was a beautiful day in Newark, Ohio the next day which saw a half house in the afternoon and the big top comfortably filled at night. Delaware, Ohio, May 21, proved a poor spot with two very small houses. At Findlay, Ohio, May 22, there was a fair crowd at the matinee but big night house. A heavy rain and windstorm which came up shortly after the afternoon performance in Defiance, Ohio,



Photo No. 15 - Robbins Bros. elephants on lot at Newton, Iowa, opening day, April 23, 1930. Elephants are identified, Columbia, partially shown behind horse, Tony at her right, and Margaret in center. John Hogan is in center. Photo by J.A. Wagner (Joe Rettinger Collection).

May 23, the final date in the state, spoiled the night business. The article continued to note that the second surprise of the week and the record night house so far this season came at Gary, Ind., May 24, where there was a big matinee and turnaway night business. Other notes said that O.A. Gilson's concert band is receiving many flattering press notices, and especially Charles Darrow, solo cornetist, who joined recently, is receiving an ovation with his solo numbers. Manny Rickman is busy every day between shows putting the ballet girls through their paces in two new numbers, produced by her husband, Bert Rickman. They are entitled, "A Dance of the Buttercups" and "Golden Dreams." Hazel Hickey, who is being featured in the high jumps, was the center of much interest in Newark, Ohio, when she received flowers from friends whom she became acquainted with in 1928, when on July 3 she suffered a fractured skull in a fall from her jumping horse on the Sells-Floto Circus. She was in the hospital for several weeks. A final item said that Dover and Newark, Ohio and Gary, Ind. were red-letter-day spots for Manager Jimmie Shropshire with the Annex. Jimmie is featuring Hines' Canadian Scotch bagpipe band and dancers. The Leon Singers, accordion and banjo players, are scoring. Peggy Poole's pit show, "Gangland," is making a cleanup with his added attraction, "The Lady Who Burns Alive or the Human Torch."

When the Robbins route turned westward from Ohio back to Indiana and Illinois it was obvious to the circus world that Buchanan's announced plan to tour the eastern states of Pennsylvania and New York would not materialize. His reasons for not pursuing the eastern route were not made public. *Variety* said that Ringling's various circuses were set to keep Robbins Bros. from going east, however they were not successful in Ohio, long time traditional early spring territory for John Robinson, now one of John Ringling's six railers. In Indiana and Illinois, both prime territories for several of the former American Circus Corporation units now owned by Ringling, Robbins

Bros. did limit its route to only three stands in Indiana and seven in Illinois for the entire 1930 season.

As spotty as business in Ohio was for Robbins Bros. it later appears that perhaps the strongest take of the entire season was done in that state. CHS Secretary-Treasurer Ed Jones sent a short newspaper clipping from *The Daily Jeffersonian* of Cambridge, Ohio commenting on the Robbins stand in that city, May 17, 1930. It stated that the show, "a four ring extravaganza" arrived in town today and provided residents with the largest circus parade on Wheeling Avenue ever seen. The local reviewer somehow counted more elephants than were in the show's herd and wrote, "more than a dozen elephants rumbled up the street, but the most curious creatures in the parade were 15 camels, which sent neighborhood dogs running for cover when the tall beasts appeared."

Robbins returned to its home state of Iowa at Cedar Rapids on May 28 then played West Union, Independence, and Webster, before moving on to Minnesota with the initial stand coming at Fairmont, June 2.

The June 14, 1930 *Billboard* carried an interesting report from F. Robert Saul the show's press agent back. He said that in both Elgin and Dixon, Illinois Robbins showed to fair matinee crowds and big night houses. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa there was another fair matinee crowd and the big top was packed in the evening, however the next day in West Union proved to be the worst frost of the season with two very small attendances at both performances. Memorial Day, May 30, was spent in Independence, Ia., where there was a capacity crowd at the matinee and a fair turnout at night. The surprise of the week came in Webster City when all records for matinees so far this season was made, however in the evening only a fair

sized crowd turned out. The article also noted that the Knight troupe of seven were now in the performance and were making a decided hit with their teeterboard, acrobatic and gymnastic turns. Antoinette and Arthur Concello received many presents in Independence, Ia., when they celebrated their first wedding anniversary. Mickey King, Alta Maie and Irma Mare Niquette are now being featured in Roman rings and a cloud-swinging act.

An item appearing in the trade publications in late May said that Will and Bob Buchanan in addition to having an automobile exhibit on Robbins Bros. also have similar auto shows on the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West as well as most of the Ringling owned units. If the report is correct evidently the Buchanans had made some sort of deal with the manufacturers to place these shows on a number of circuses in addition to Robbins.

Other Minnesota towns played by Robbins after Fairmont included Jackson, Pipestone, and Marshall, then the show headed further westward into South Dakota with stands scheduled at Brookings, Huron, Pierre, Gettysburg, Aberdeen, Britton, and Milbank. On June 14 the route returned the show to Minnesota at Montevideo which was followed by Winona and Rochester. A tour of Wisconsin began at La Crosse, June 18, then came Viroqua, Tomah, Wisconsin Rapids, Sturgeon Bay, and Green Bay. The string of Wisconsin dates was broken only by two days in Michigan, Iron Mountain, June 25 and Escanaba the following day. On June 27 the show returned to Wisconsin at Appleton then came dates at Burlington, Waupaca, Stevens Point, Marshfield, Mondovi, and Baraboo, July 4. Two additional stands followed Baraboo, Richland Center and Prairie du Chein, then the show's tour of Wisconsin for the 1930 season was over.

In the meantime from the time the show left Iowa at Webster City back on May 31 there was nothing concerning the show's route in the trade publications. Before the end of May the regular route carried each week in the *Billboard* ceased, other than for some weeks a single date and stand would be shown no doubt for mail purposes only. When June came on the scene it began getting hot and dry and didn't let up for the remainder of the summer. The depression was here for sure and virtually all shows began to suffer at the ticket wagon, Robbins Bros. being no exception.

By mid June rumors were everywhere that Buchanan had cut 20 cars from the Robbins train and sent them back to Granger quarters. The show was continuing on 10. Christy Bros. had earlier cut its train in half from



Photo No. 17 - Robbins Bros. litho advertising Cliff Gregg, Human Cannon Ball. Lettering at top is in green, white, and yellow, with "Human Cannon Ball" red, trimmed in yellow. Title is in red. Background at top is dark blue with yellow at bottom. Date tag is for San Rafael, Calif., Oct. 4, 1930. Kent Ghirard Collection.

20 to 10 cars and was limping along with the reduced show because of bad business. The June 27, 1930 *Billboard* carried an article with headlines "Robbins Show Not Reduced. Owner Fred Buchanan denies report that show has been cut to ten cars." The article read, "Fred Buchanan, owner of Robbins Bros. Circus, in a telegram to the *Billboard* states that the show has not been cut to ten cars, according to a report. He states that while near quarters at Granger, Iowa last week, a store car, one coach, and two extra flats were sent home. The show is the same size as when seen in Middletown, Ohio early in the season. Business is 20 percent off from last season, although during the last week, business was even better than in 1929."

History has later pointed out that the widespread rumors of the Robbins show being cut from thirty cars to ten and Buchanan's statement that he only reduced the size of his train five cars from 30 to 25 were both incorrect. The fact is that ten cars were cut from the Robbins train and sent back to Granger quarters. Several other eyewitness reports printed in both the trade and fan publications put the

number of cars in the Robbins train in mid-summer and early fall at 20 and we have the most reliable statement from the late Bill Woodcock Sr. that it was 10 cars that went back to Granger in mid-season and that the show came into quarters at the conclusion of the season on 20.

The date of the cut is not known to the author, however it must have been sometime between late May and the middle of June. Likewise the breakdown as to type of the ten cars eliminated is not known. I don't believe Woodcock knew for sure, but he was positive on the total number. An educated guess would be that the ten cars consisted of three stock, six flats and one coach, leaving the train now to move with 1 advance, 4 stocks, 9 flats, and 6 coaches—a total of 20.

Wagons on the flats returning to Granger are known to have included the Two Hemispheres, China, Panama, and South America parade wagons, also the four pony floats, Santa Claus, Mother Goose, Old Woman in Shoe, and Cinderella. The group likewise included the former Barnum & Bailey hippo den and it's assumed also the ex Forepaugh-Sells tableau den with the corner statues. Although no photos have turned up picturing the latter at Granger the wagon definitely did not end up at the Hall quarters in Lancaster, Mo. at the conclusion of the 1930 season with the rest of the 20 car train. It is also assumed that a number of baggage wagons were sent to Granger in mid-season as well as additional cages. If the "educated guess" of six flats is correct then approximately 20 wagons in all could have been involved.

Although a number of people visited the Granger quarters in the years following the cut in the Robbins train in mid-season 1930 and photographed some of these wagons mentioned above in various stages of disintegration so far we have been unable to find even a trace of information concerning the disposition of the ten rail cars. What happened to them has long been one of many great mysteries for the circus historian.

Leaving Wisconsin for the final time in 1930 the Robbins show then went



ROBBINS BROS CIRCUS

WINTER QUARTERS
GRANGER, IOWA.

back into Iowa again with its first stand at Cresco, July 7, followed by Charles City, Spencer, and Hawarden. While Robbins was in Cresco, that day in Greeley, Colo. Christy Bros. was making its final stand of the 1930 season. George W. Christy, the show's owner, said he was forced to close on account of the continuing bad business. His show had been out 12 weeks and as mentioned earlier it had been cut in half to 10 cars in Clovis, N. M. but even with the reduced nut the take was not large enough to keep it going. The Christy Bros. Circus, the first major circus casualty of the great depression, then returned to its South Houston, Texas quarters. Although Christy himself would remain in some sort of show business the Christy Bros. flat car type railroad circus would never again tour.

In the same issue of *Billboard* (July 19, 1930) which told the full story of the Christy show finish a report was published from Billy Stiles, who had recently closed with the Rose Killian overland circus. He said that the current season was the worst he's seen in 28 years of trouping. The hot and dry weather had burned the crops in Kentucky and Tennessee. The drought had also covered much of the midwestern states. The Killian show itself had gone on into West Virginia but business there was still not very good. It was trying to hang on until it was cotton picking time in the South.

Robbins made another run into South Dakota, July 11, at Madison, then played Mitchell before moving over into Minnesota for a single date at Worthington. A return to Iowa came the following day at Le Mars, July 15, where several residents from Sioux City, not on the 1930 Robbins route, came over for a visit with Manager Buchanan. Included in the party were Nate Dax and A.B. Friedman, owners and operators of the World and Hipp theaters. Milo McIntyre, formerly on the advance of several shows and F.C. Lake, well known for his home talent productions throughout Florida also came. These gentlemen wrote to the *Billboard* that the show had two fair sized audiences at the stand. They also praised the Robbins show as being one of the finest and cleanest on the road. A sizeable string of Iowa dates followed Le Mars, and included Ida Grove, Jefferson, a two day stand, July 17-18, in conjunction with the local fair, Grinnell, Winterset, In-

This attractive lettering of the Robbins title appeared on a letterhead of the show used in 1930. The same design was used on big show tickets. The title is in red outlined in black. Pfening Archives.

dianola, Knoxville, Albia, Lamoni, Humeston, Clarinda, and Shenandoah. At Clarinda, July 28, four valuable horses and three mules of the show died from eating grass along the Burlington Railway right of way, which had been treated with a poison chemical spray used to check growth of vegetation along the tracks. Three high-school horses, one of Buck Owen's ponies, and three mules died within three hours after grazing along the tracks. Press reports said that suits against the railroad company are threatened on grounds that no warning signs had been posted of the poison treatment of the weeds.

The last date in Iowa, Shenandoah, July 29, would turn out to be the final stand ever to be played in Iowa by the Fred Buchanan owned Robbins Bros. Circus. The show would not return to its home state any more in 1930 nor would there be any dates during 1931, its last season of operation.

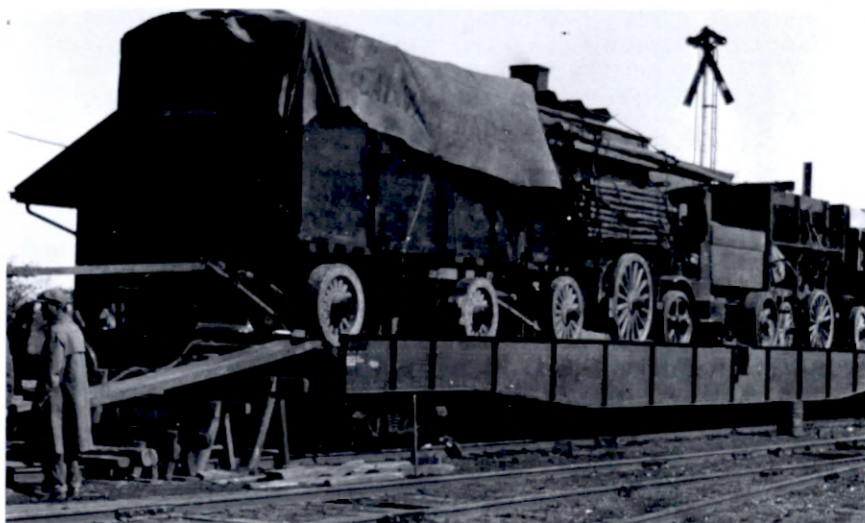
On July 30 the show went into Nebraska at Nebraska City, then played Beatrice, Hebron, and Super-

ior. On August 3, the Robbins train was on a Sunday run following its stand in Superior to Oberlin, Kan. while back in Prairie du Chien, Wis., the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show announced it was closing its season and returning to the Marland, Okla. winterquarters. It was the second major circus casualty of the great depression. The heat, drought, and poor business made the closing a necessity. Early indications were that the Ranch show was finished permanently but a reduced version under new management did go on the road again in 1931. The same *Billboard* issue which told of the Ranch show's closing said that Ringling-Barnum's business in Ohio recently had been satisfactory.

For many weeks in the summer of 1930 there was a virtual news blackout concerning the Robbins show. It is difficult to determine the exact situation with the performance after the reduction of the train. In late June *Variety* reported that Robbins Bros. had let Cliff Gregg and his cannon act out. It is assumed this was true and only natural that Buchanan would trim the nut of the performance by eliminating some of the more expensive acts. The show did continue to post billing paper advertising the cannon act as evidenced by the sheet with the late season date tag printed here. *Variety* in early August erroneously reported that Robbins was increasing the size of the show, adding a new big top and 1,400 reserve seats. However, the editor writing in *The White Tops* said he had been informed by CFA members who had recently seen Robbins Bros. that the show was moving on 20 cars (19 back and 1 ahead). They also reported that the show had sent their grandstand and some wagons back to quarters. It was still giving a street parade but the performance was off.

Early and mid August saw Robbins

Photo No. 20 - Robbins Bros. loaded flat cars shortly after arrival at Lancaster, Mo. following close of the 1930 season. Show went into quarters at the William P. Hall farm. Print from a negative owned by late Bill Woodcock Sr. (Joe Bradbury Collection)



playing dates in Kansas at Oberlin, Norton, Burlington, Colby, Wakeeney, Russell, Ellsworth, Junction City, Beloit, Osborne, Concordia, and Washington. However, there were no reports of how the show was faring businesswise. In all probability the take continued low as was true of practically every show. In fact the summer of 1930 saw some of the smallest grosses of the entire depression. The sweltering heat and crop killing drought were as much to blame as the general business downturn in making it rough on shows during this period. It was customary in those days for the *Billboard* to print summaries from the various carnivals of each week's stand. Business generated at the date was also included. An example of carnival business in these reports printed in the July 26, 1930 *Billboard* read thusly, "terrible," "poor," "very poor," some "fair" but very few "good."

Evidently there had been considerable changes in the Robbins sideshow lineup as evidenced by this advertisement appearing in the Aug. 9, 1930 *Billboard*.

"ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS SIDE SHOW. Wanted. Join immediately. Acts of merit. Sword Swallower. Snake Act, Impalement act, Musical act, Scotch Band, Ticket seller making second openings. Mr. Silk, Mr. St. Elmo, accordion player; Dan Robey, bagpipe player, answer. (The route from August 7-11 in Kansas was given.)

A week later the same ad was run with an updated route. All replies were advised to contact James Shropshire, Annex manager.

Robbins returned for a few more dates in Nebraska following its stay in Kansas. The initial stand was at Holdrege, Aug. 18, with additional dates at Kearney, Gothenburg, and North Platte. The show then moved over into Colorado for a single stand at Julesburg and returned immediately to Nebraska to play Kimball and Sidney which were the final towns in that state to see Robbins Bros. in 1930. Next came a move into Wyoming to play Cheyenne, Aug. 30, which was followed by a long Sunday run south to Pueblo, Colo. where performances were given on Monday, Sept. 1, Labor Day. Two additional Colorado stands followed, La Junta and Holly.

The trade publications noted that Pat Knight of the Knight Troupe with Robbins Bros. has added a new trick to the teeter-board act—a double layout from the board to the pad—and is going over nicely. Paul Knight's triple somersault to the chair is one of the features of the act. Another performance note said that Buck Owens is scoring with his cowboys, girls, and Indians.

The Sept. 13, 1930 *Billboard* said that Robbins Bros. "set 'em on the straw" both matinee and night at Pueblo, Colo. and had two full houses at La Junta the following day. Other items of interest in the report were that Kenneth R. Waite and his very costly list of clown props and coterie of "joeys" have been scoring at each performance. Joe Graham and Bill Faith have joined Buck Owens' Wild West department. Graham is late of the Sells-Floto Circus and is a high-class roper. Thomas V. Page, one of the under-standers of the Knight troupe of seven people, teeter-board act, stepped into a hole along the railroad track while going to the lot at La Junta and badly injured an ankle. He was rushed to a hospital where he received treatment and is expected to be back in the act within a few days. A final note said that the show jumped 238 miles from Cheyenne, Wyo. to Pueblo and in on time, credit due Paul Barton, master of transportation.



Photo No. 19 - Robbins Bros. litho posted at San Rafael, Calif., Oct. 4, 1930 advertises Bingo, Largest Elephant in the World. Color scheme has a red blanket trimmed in yellow and green with lettering in white. The elephant is in natural colors on a light blue background. Kent Ghirard Collection.

While Robbins Bros. was at Pueblo, Colo. on Labor Day, Sept. 1, Hagenbeck-Wallace was at Freeport, Ill. and would close for the season and return to its Peru, Ind. quarters following the evening performance. Labor Day also saw the season's close of Elmer H. Jones' three car gilly type circus, Cole & Rogers, at Springfield, N. Y. A couple of weeks earlier Floyd King's ten car Cole Bros. Circus closed at Scotts-

ville, Ky. on August 11. The continued business depression, severe drought and heat were listed as causes of the Cole Bros. failure. Floyd King once told the author that the close in Scottsville was just a case of running out of money, he didn't have enough to pay the railroad for the next move. The great depression was gobbling up circuses at a rapid rate by now. The Floyd King version of Cole Bros. was finished for all time.

Robbins Bros. went back into Kansas at Scott City, Sept. 4 and the following day was at Ness City, Sept. 5. The date of Sept. 5, 1930 would go down in circus history as the final stand ever for the famous John Robinson Circus. It was in Lincoln, Nebraska playing the final day of its stand at the state fair there. After the evening performance its 1930 season was concluded and the train sent back to the Peru, Ind. winterquarters. The John Robinson Circus would not go out in 1931 and became the first permanent casualty of John Ringling's circus empire.

Robbins played two more Kansas dates, Larned and Garden City, then returned to Colorado at Las Animas, Sept. 8, which was followed by one more stand in the state, Trinidad the next day.

The Sept. 20, 1930 *Billboard* said that reports from Robbins Bros. indicate that the show is now doing a nice business. "The Christy Show got into the territory too early in the season," says a Robbins attache. "We evidently got in at the opportune time, as business during the last week has been very good."

As is usually the case whenever a circus has been suffering a small take of late there is very little reported about the show in the trade publications, however when there is a pickup of business, the customary reports seem to find their way back into print. The Sept. 27, 1930 *Billboard* had a nice write-up on Robbins activities. It was mentioned that Slat Beeson, who was with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, joined Robbins at Garden City, Kan., Sept. 8, and is going over big with his dancing and other feats on the wire. Don Taylor, who was with John Robinson, has joined the sideshow, under management of James Shropshire. Lawrence Cross is presenting two very good walkarounds in the clown department. It was also noted that Tom, Kate, and Hickory Smith, presenting domestic animal acts, have been with Fred Buchanan shows for the last 22 years. O.A. Gilson and his 21 piece band, including air calliope, is receiving much applause at each stand. He is playing one of Jack Little's latest numbers, "I Am Needing You."

It was evident that a number of new Robbins personnel were coming over

from other shows now closed for the season. A few weeks earlier W.M. (Egypt) Thompson who was with Christy Bros. joined as legal adjuster.

Robbins Bros. next moved south into New Mexico at Raton, which was followed by Santa Fe, Belen, Albuquerque, and Gallup. Major Gordon W. Lillie (Pawnee Bill) was the personal guest of Fred Buchanan at Raton, N.M. The famed showman was engaged in producing a spec, Frontier Days of '49, in Raton to be held Sept. 12-14.

The show was now into territory never before played by Robbins Bros.; however, Buchanan had routed his Yankee Robinson circus in the area many years before. Robbins continued westward and following the final date in New Mexico at Gallup, Sept. 16, went into Arizona to play Winslow, Flagstaff, Prescott, and Phoenix.

A long Sunday run followed Phoenix as the show headed on to California and a stand at Portersdale, Sept. 22.

The *Billboard* said that Robbins played Albuquerque, N.M., September 15, to very nice business at both performances, and received complimentary afternotices in both dailies relative to the excellent performance and street parade.

From all reports the show had done considerably better business so far in September than it had in the two previous months.

Robbins had opposition with the Al G. Barnes Circus at Phoenix, Ariz. Robbins played September 20 with Al G. Barnes scheduled for October 2. In the spring Phoenix had seen Cole Bros. on April 17 and on November 17, Gentry Bros. would make an appearance, giving that city a total of four circuses for the season.

The Oct. 4, 1930 *Billboard* said that Robbins Bros. played to good business at Phoenix and then went to Porterville, Calif. playing to fair business. The article noted that this is the first trip to California for the show, and every department is moving along nicely. Pat Knight is now presenting a nice foot slide after practicing all summer. The Bob Taber show was near Robbins Bros. at Porterville and Taber was a visitor. He reported that his business has been up to expecta-

tions. It was mentioned that Thomas V. Page is back on the job after being out of the Knight act for two weeks.

Robbins continued in California and next played Hanford, Fresno, Merced, Modesto, Stockton, Lodi, Roseville, and was at Marysville, on September 30, the final day of the month.

September saw the close of two more of the Ringling units, Sparks on the 22nd and Sells-Floto on the 29th, both shows ending their seasons several weeks earlier than usual. Sells-Floto with its top attraction, famed Hollywood western star, Tom Mix, had done pretty well, but the Sparks take had been poor.

Robbins Bros. was at Woodland, Calif., October 1, and continued its route through the state playing Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and was at San Rafael, October 4.

CFA member Kent Ghirard says he regretted not being able to see the Robbins show when it was near San Francisco in 1930 but fortunately he pulled several of the show's lithographs which were posed for the stand at San Raphael. A great one was the sheet advertising the cannon act which had the date tag intact. Mr. Ghirard very kindly loaned photos of these extremely rare Robbins lithos to be reproduced for this article.

Following San Rafael the show played Vallejo, Pittsburg, Palo Alto, San Jose, Tracey, Visalia, and was in Bakersfield, October 11, the final stand in California. The show then moved on a Sunday run to Arizona where performances were given in Kingman, Monday, Oct. 13. In the meantime Ringling-Barnum closed October 10 at Montgomery, Ala. and two days later, Oct. 12, Al G. Barnes closed at San Pedro, Calif. the last of the Ringling shows. So Buchanan had the honor of keeping his show out longer in 1930 than any of the other railroad circuses. However, he didn't last much longer.

Two full days, Oct. 14 and 15th were

Photo No. 21 - Robbins Bros. elephant car No. 38 shortly after arrival at Lancaster, Mo. following close of the 1930 season. Print from a negative owned by late Bill Woodcock Sr. (Joe Bradbury Collection)



spent enroute as the show made a long run to Clovis, N.M. which was played on the 16th. Moving eastward fast the show played Pampa, Texas, Oct. 17, and then on to Alva, Okla. where the 1930 season came to an end October 18. From Alva the train was routed to Lancaster, Mo. where the show went into winterquarters at the William P. Hall farm.

The Oct. 25, 1930 *Billboard* carried a very short piece about the Robbins closing. It said that the show closed on October 18 at Alva, Okla. and would go into quarters at Lancaster, Mo. The show went into Alva on three days billing. It had been planned to take the show into the regular winter quarters at Granger, Iowa, and it is not known why the switch was made.

Tradition has long held that Buchanan ran out of funds while in California and that it was only through money loaned by William P. Hall that the show was able to make it back to quarters. No doubt Hall insisted that the train be sent to his place in Lancaster. In all probability Hall received a mortgage on the show's equipment at the time he furnished the money to enable the train to make it back to Lancaster. We know for certain that Hall held a mortgage on the show during the 1931 season.

In the *Billboard* dated Oct. 18, 1930, coincidentally the day Robbins Bros. closed for the season, Frank (Doc) Stuart, a very colorful character, writing in his column, "Sawdust" had the following to say concerning Fred Buchanan and his show.

"Ere (that is a class word, ere) this appears in print, the old barn will claim all but one of the railroad shows and that one belongs to Sir Frederick Buchanan, of Granger, Ia., and known as the Robbins Bros. Circus. Sir Frederick is all of the brothers, but that does not make any difference to either you or Sir Frederick. He owns a circus, he does. It was a large circus but he brought forth the old chisel and chiseled off some cars until it now numbers 20. His reason for the chiseling was too much expense. As soon as he performed the operation he immediately engaged Herberta Beason (Slats) and some excellent acts to run the expense up to where it was before he did the chisel act." Stuart went on to say that the blame for the condition existing and the placing of nearly all circuses in mothballs for the winter has been passed on to the Republican party by some and the Democratic element by others. Stuart noted that most of us labor under the impression that it is a lack of money and labor cannot labor where there is a lack of money. Stuart said that what the money market needs is a laxative and when some individual slips that little pill in its soup, the circuses will

prosper along with all other lines of business.

Although Robbins was the last of the railers to close a number of motorized shows were still on tour. Al F. Wheeler closed October 25 and Hunt's, October 27, but Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Gentry Bros., Mighty Haag, and Seils-Sterling were still going. Seils-Sterling closed for the season November 15. Mighty Haag probably closed within the next couple weeks but Downie Bros. stayed out until Dec. 20 when it shuttered at Tifton, Ga. Gentry Bros. making a long season enroute to the west coast by the southern route took the honors of staying on the road the longest during depression ridden 1930. That show was bookd for Santa Ana, Calif., Dec. 26-27 and closed shortly thereafter.

Soon after Robbins Bros. closed there were rumors that Buchanan had sold his show to William P. Hall and this matter was not cleared up for some time. Under the Marquee column in the Nov. 8, 1930 *Billboard* said "there is nothing to report that Fred Buchanan has sold his Robbins Bros. Circus to Col. W.P. Hall of Lancaster, Mo."

Finally in the Nov. 22, 1930 *Billboard* there was an article which said that Fred Buchanan was contacted in Kansas City, Mo. where he was spending several days on business and he denied the recent rumors that his show had been sold. Buchanan advised his show would open in Lancaster, Mo. in 1931 with the spring

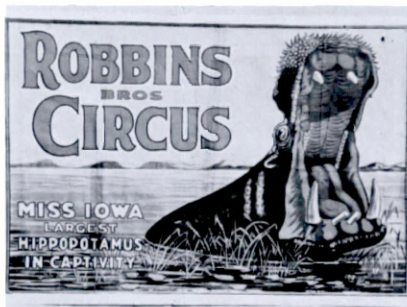


Photo No. 16 - Robbins Bros. litho used to advertise Miss Iowa, hippo, in 1930. Title is in red with other lettering white. Top background is yellow with green water. Hippo is in natural colors with inside mouth, red and teeth, white. Kent Ghirard Collection.

routing leading eastward.

Some weeks after Robbins closed an interesting item appeared in the Nov. 29, 1930 *Billboard* telling of an accident on the show which had not previously been reported. The article said that when the show played Modesto, Calif., Sept. 26, Pat Knight of the Knight seven-people teeter-board acrobatic act, met with a serious accident. While doing a double from the board to pad he fell and broke his back. He was rushed to the hospital at Stockton, Calif. and was there for some time. He is now at home in Marianna, Fla., getting along fine and says that he will be ready for the same trick next spring.

Charles Wirth writing in the Sawdust and Spangles column in the Dec. 13, 1930 *Billboard* summed up the circus season recently concluded and said that these shows had satisfactory seasons, Ringling-Barnum, Sells-Floto, Gentry Bros., Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., and Al F. Wheeler. Wirth also said that indications are that 1931 conditions will be better than 1930 but we do not look for a big change overnight. We believe that the improvements in busines conditions will be gradual.

There was only one other mention in the trade publications concerning Robbins Bros. The Dec. 20, 1930 *Billboard* said that for the 1931 season the title of the show would be changed to World Bros., but there was nothing further leaving the reader to his own speculations as to the reason for the change.

And so the first full year of the great depression, 1930, faded into history. Those expecting business conditions to improve in the coming year would be disappointed. The Democrats had won heavily in the mid-term elections and would control the Congress. That party along with their friends in newspapers and radio would put the blame on a harrassed Herbert Hoover, the Republican president, and for fifty years (or longer) into the future it would be "Hoover's Depression." It was bleak times for business, circuses included, and the end was still well into the future.

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by Robert Hasson

The year was 1942 and it was my sixth season with the circus. Prior to joining Ringling Bros., and Barnum & Bailey in 1937, my show business activities were in the carnival field where I was born and raised. I had been through some bad storms and floods, "hey rubes," blow-downs, fires, and witnessed many confrontations; but I will never forget what I saw and experienced on August 4, in Cleveland, Ohio.

The lot in Cleveland on Ninth Street near Lake Erie was large enough for all the circus tents except the cookhouse. It was set up across the street opposite the big-top. It was the second day of a four day engagement and opening call for the side show was noon. I went directly from the train to the cookhouse where the "hotel" flag told me that food was being served. Before the waiter had time to bring my order, someone rushed in the doorway and shouted that the menagerie was on fire. The word "fire" is all anyone had to hear to see a wild exodus.

Running across the street to the midway I could hear elephants trumpeting, and the sounds of pain coming from all the other animals who were able to utter anything. I went to the Main Entrance, and Paul Miller of Miller Brothers Concessions and I started to pick up and carry the railings that formed the aisles for passage into the menagerie, out from the marquee. We had just removed a second section when a giraffe came running out and almost over the two of us. The holocaust was all over in a matter of a few minutes but the devastation that it left and sounds from the burned and injured animals was pitiful.

Animal attendants cried openly as

they looked upon their dead charges whom they considered friends. Dr. J.Y. Henderson, the circus veterinarian, had tears streaming down his face as he was accompanied by a city policeman going from cage to cage and instructing the officer what animal was to be relieved of its suffering with a single bullet to the head. A couple of hours after the tragedy was over, local citizens were bringing some of the lead stock that were cut loose from their tie-down ropes, back to the lot. The giraffe that almost ran over Paul Miller and me was the only survivor of the three the show carried. One of the two lost, Henrietta, was born in Sarasota and was named for Henry Ringling North. She was the off-spring of the other two.

I am of the same opinion as many

Show workingmen battling fire in the cages. The cage at right housed a pigmy hippopotamus who saved his life by remaining submerged in his tank.

The Cleveland circus grounds on fire August 4, 1942. The horse top on the right escaped, as did the modern suspended top for Gargantua that was between the menagerie and the big top. All photos are from the Pfening Archives.

others that day, that the two things that saved the big top was (1) the wind was blowing away in the opposite direction and (2) the fact that the gorilla top separated the menagerie and the big top by at least 60 feet. What I saw and experienced in Cleveland that day made me feel very thankful that I wasn't present in Hartford, Conn., two years later where the loss of human lives and injuries was much more dreadful and beyond all comparisons.

On the first page of the Circus section, the August 15, 1942 issue of the *Billboard* carried the following headline and story: OVER 40 RB ANIMALS BURN. CLEVELAND MENAGERIE FIRE LOSS ESTIMATED BY





The ground is still smoldering along with charred giraffe cages as the fire was brought under control.

NORTH AT \$200,000; POLICE QUIZ ALLEGED INCENDIARY.

Cleveland, Aug. 8—Police, including Chief John Brice, of the circus, do not credit the story told by Ford after questioning him as to details. They believe it possible that he may have sought to be the center of a sensation. More information is being sought about him from his family in Pittsburgh. The youth is reported to have suffered a fractured skull in an auto accident last winter.

The story goes on to say: "More than forty animals, some trained, are dead as a result of fire that consumed the 320 by 120 foot six-pole menagerie top of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus on the lakefront lot here last Tuesday about two hours before the afternoon performance was scheduled. Loss, not covered by insurance, was estimated by John Ringling North at \$200,000.

"That the blaze was of incendiary origin was claimed by police, who arrested a young colored former employee and who has, they say, confessed that he and a companion set fire to menagerie hay 'to get even with the circus for firing us.'

"Press reports praised the efficien-

cy of circus employees for getting many animals out of the burning tent. Police cordons held back crowds and police with guns aided circus attaches in destroying some animals too badly burned to recover. Grief of performers and workingmen over the fatal plight of the animals was commented upon generally by press and radio.

"TOP FROM SARASOTA. Menagerie was opened to the public for the Tuesday night performance of the local engagement, Monday thru Thursday, with sidewalls only. A reserve top was ordered shipped from winter quarters in Sarasota, Fla., for the opening in Akron yesterday. Twenty-three damaged cage wagons were restored for use within a few hours. One giraffe wagon was demolished. Full performances were given on Tuesday night and on Wednesday and Thursday to tremendous crowds. Officials said they expected to present a menagerie back to normal at Monday's stand in Youngstown, O.

"The fire was fanned by a brisk breeze. General Manager Art Concello estimated shortly after the blaze was extinguished that final total loss of animals might be about fifty. President North said that intangible losses in terms of animals of rare origin, ir-

After the fire was out and the smoke cleared two giraffe lay dead. They were shot to relieve their agony.



The show grounds layered with smoke, as working men battled the blaze. A group of camels in foreground had been put out of their agony with a sub-machine gun.

replaceable because of wartime shipping restrictions, might bring the total loss to a higher figure than the estimated \$200,000.

"Cause of the fire, considered one of the worst in circus history, naturally created much speculation. As so often happens when onlookers spread sensational rumors unsupported by evidence, it was reported that two small boys had set fire to the menagerie top. One of the workingmen who was first on the scene thought that the blaze originated in the roof of the tent, possibly caused by a spark from a passing locomotive, a railroad line being within a few hundred yards of the grounds. While many remarked how fortunate it was that the fire had not occurred during the performance, it was pointed out by the circus management that at such a time there would have been several hundred employees on the job and flames could have been quickly extinguished. James Santangelo, 22, New London, Conn., an usher, sustained a gashed hand which was torn by an elephant hook while a handler was leading an elephant to safety.

"PRIORITY FOR REPAIRS: The circus became the first business to benefit here from new priority powers of the War Production Board, J.B. French, regional priority manager, giving it a rating which assured quick repairs to electrical generating equipment destroyed by the fire, and city power being made available during repairs. Although the matinee had to be cancelled, the show reopened to a large crowd at 8:30 that night. Further aid was given the management through the offer of Mayor Frank J. Lausche of use of city buildings to house animals. The Animal Protective League also came to the aid of the circus in the treatment of injured animals and prompt disposal of 36 carcasses at a rendering plant.





"Quick action saved the gorillas, Gargantua and Toto, their air-conditioned cages having been adjacent to the menagerie at the time of the fire. Cutting the ropes holding the canvas above the cages, which had been doused with water from a fire hose, allowed the canvas to form a protection and enabled attendants to move the cages away from the flames, the occupants being entirely unaware of the situation.

"SPECIAL MEDICAMENT USED: Some animals with singed hides, that were so frightened as to cause fears for their recovery, have been pronounced okay and are expected to recover, being kept under observation. Dr. J.Y. Henderson, circus veterinarian, and assistants worked throughout the night and early morning hours in an effort to save the lives of injured animals and to give relief through application of a special medicament known as 'foille,' a 15 gallon drum of which was flown by air express from New York City. This soothing oil was swabbed over bodies of the animals with long handled brushes. Superintendent McClain, whose face was scorched, reported that he used

this preparation on himself with excellent results.

"A near-capacity crowd witnessed the Tuesday night performance. If one had not known of the fire, there was nothing about the performance itself or appearance of grounds to indicate what had happened a few hours before.

"YOUTH HELD BY POLICE: Lemandria Ford, 16 year old Negro, was returned here from Pittsburgh, where District Attorney Russell H. Adams quoted Ford as saying he and a companion tossed lighted cigarettes into the menagerie hay because they had been discharged by the circus management. Ford was said by the prosecutor to have remarked, 'I felt pretty sorry when I saw all those dead animals around.' A search was begun for the companion Ford is said to have declared was with him.

"It was said Ford and another worker were hired on July 26 while the show was in Pittsburgh and were later discharged for being absent from duty Tuesday morning before the fire, were paid off that afternoon a few hours after the fire and disappeared after receiving their pay. Ford was ar-

A group of burned cages that had been pulled out of the fire, but not before being badly damaged.

rested by railroad detectives at Duquesne, near Pittsburgh, while riding a freight train and was held on a charge of illegal riding. A railroad detective said Ford had menagerie meal tickets in his possession.

"SORROW IN SARASOTA: Sarasota, Fla., Aug. 8—How deeply the Ringling-Barnum circus fire tragedy was felt in Sarasota, the show's winter home, was reflected in an editorial in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* on August 5, captioned, 'The Menagerie Fire,' as follows: 'It was only natural for the circus performers to go about their acts in Cleveland last night with heavy hearts. Here in Sarasota we also had heavy hearts. Even wild animals have something that begets a feeling of attachment in people who come in contact with them. To us in Sarasota the circus animals were somewhat like house pets. We feel they are a vital part of our community. Out of this feeling came a feeling of horror that possessed us when we read of the sudden and terrible destruction of circus animals yesterday afternoon.

'Anything that affects the circus is keenly felt in Sarasota. Last fall the death of several elephants in Charlotte, N.C., brought up a deep sense of sorrow. The tragic death of some 40 animals in the holocaust in Cleveland has only deepened that feeling of sorrow. Any loss entailed upon the circus is felt as a loss by all of us. John and Henry North have in this most unfortunate incident the heart-felt sympathy of their fellow citizens. It is a most deplorable and regrettable misfortune.'

At this point in the story, the author would like to inject a few words to clear up a mistake the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* made regarding the several elephants that died in the Fall of 1941. Ten elephants died the evening of November 5, in Atlanta, Ga. Among the ten was an African Pigmy, one of two that the circus had at that time. The show played Greenville, S.C., the day before and some of the elephants were grazing near a building adjacent to the circus lot. After the elephants became seriously ill the following morning in Atlanta, it was learned the animals had eaten grass that was contaminated with poison from chemicals that were manufactured in that building in Greenville.

"FIRE DEATH TOLL: Four elephants—Ringling Rosy, 20 years old (only ballet elephant lost); Rosy, (Wallace) 20; One-Eyed Troby, 40,



The tangled pipe entry-way and netting of the marquee is shown with a group of cages in the background.

dropped dead on street after fire; Kass, 25, died night after fire. Also 13 camels, 9 zebras, 2 giraffes, 4 lions, 2 tigers, 1 llama, 1 puma, 2 brindled gnus, 3 Indian deer, 2 midget burros.

"Of all the lead stock only one llama was lost. Walter McClain, superintendent of elephants, considers it a miracle that of 45 elephants, 41 were saved. Considering the fact that the menagerie top burned completely in about three minutes and most of the attendants were eating dinner at the time, John Ringling North gave McClain and his helpers great praise for their work during the fire and for getting the menagerie ready for the night show."

On the first page of the August 22 issue of the *Billboard* a story appeared with the caption, "SPEEDY PRIORITY ACTION SAVES RB CIRCUS GORILLAS FROM FIRE New York, Aug. 15—The saving of the gorillas, Gargantua and Toto, in the great Cleveland fire which destroyed animals and equipment of the Ringling circus on August 4 was accomplished by the United States government through what is described as 'a fortunate coincidence' by Melvin D. Hildreth, the famous Washington lawyer and top-ranking circus authority.

"We are indebted to Christopher J. Dunphy, chief of the amusement section of the War Production Board, for furnishing the details, which came in the form of a letter to him from Mr. Hildreth on August 10. The attorney wrote as follows:

'While Ringling Bros., circus was playing at Cleveland I received a telegram from the show to the effect that it was facing "an extreme emergency" unless it were able to secure approval of priority applications having to do with the repair of five Diesel tractors. Without the tractors the show could not move on.

'By an interesting but fortunate coincidence, your division and the emergency repair and maintenance division (of WPB) speedily approved the applications because of the emergency confronting the show. Little did we think that a disastrous fire would sweep through the menagerie, causing great loss. However, the loss would have been greater had it not been for your promptness in issuing approval of the priority applications. As a result of having the tractors in service at the time of the fire, they were able to move quickly two cages housing Gargantua and Toto, the almost priceless gorillas. The tractors were also able to bring the sprinkler cart to the fire, where water could be sprayed on the flames under pressure.

'On behalf of Ringling Bros., and Barnum & Bailey and its entire personnel, I desire to express our great and sincere appreciation for your



An elephant that escaped injury is led from the scorched earth where the grand menagerie of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows had stood only minutes before.

prompt and effective cooperation in this important matter.' "

A follow-up of the above story was an opinion written by Leonard Traube of the *Billboard* staff: "A striking feature of this revelation is Mr. Hildreth's statement that the 'extreme emergency' was being faced by the circus only one day, as it turned out, before the fire because he used the phrase "while Ringling Bros. was playing at Cleveland." Since the show started its Cleveland engagement on August 3 and the fire occurred on August 4, Mr. Hildreth's 'speedily approved' reference appears to be somewhat of an understatement, but it should be said that the brilliant lawyer is conservative in many respects. He could have called it 'a miracle of speed' without being accused of going ballyhooistic.

"If this is the kind of speed that the Axis powers must contend with from one of the United Nations before long, if not at this very moment, the 'how' is how are we going to beat them is already assured and it is only a question of 'when.' "

This elephant had been put out of pain by Cleveland Detective Inspector Frank W. Story, using a rifle and eight bullets.



A short article on the first page of the circus section in the August 22 issue of the *Billboard* stated that the elephant mentioned as One-Eyed Troby, should have read One-Eyed Trilby. Names of the giraffes burned were Henrietta and Andy. Soudana is with the show. An ostrich also was lost and all camels and zebras.

A boxed item on the first page of the circus section of the August 29 issue of the *Billboard* with caption and story read: RB FIRE "SUSPECT" CALLED MENTAL CASE. Cleveland Aug. 22—A delinquency hearing for Lamadris Ford, 16 year old colored boy from Pittsburgh whose tale that he helped start the Ringling-Barnum circus menagerie fire here on August 4 had left detectives skeptical, was held on Thursday before Juvenile Court Judge Harry L. Eastman. Based upon an examination by a psychiatrist and the accepted conclusions of Detective Inspector Frank W. Story, Ford was ordered returned to Pittsburgh, of which he is a resident, with recommendations that he be committed to a home for the feeble minded.

The youth, police said, continued repeated admissions and denials of his part in setting the fire right up to the time of his hearing. During the hearing he sat in silence. His Father and Mother were in court.

Detective Inspector Story said he had not uncovered any further clues as to origin of the fire.

"YOU OTTO C. FLOTO"

The Otto Floto Shows in Kansas

H.H. Tammen of the *Denver Post* sent his show forth in 1903 with the title abbreviated to the Floto Shows, United, omitting the first name of Otto Floto but failing to explain with what the show was "united." The new edition was far better organized than the show of 1902, especially in the press and advertising departments. Gone were the one column, two inch ads buried in the news of the community. In many instances cartoon characters were used in large displays and the ads, which frequently ran the full length of the page, two, three or four columns wide, could not possibly be mistaken for anything but the advertisements of an aggressive, wide-awake circus, which, despite its diminutive size, confessed it was the best in the world. In the season of last year the advance car was generally four or five days ahead of the show, but in 1903 the billing was as a rule two weeks ahead of the date. Newspaper ads appeared frequently in all of the papers of a town.

The season of 1903 began, according to the *Hutchinson (Kansas) Daily Bee*, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, March 25. There are extensive gaps in the known route. The show played Marshall, Texas, April 3, Longview, April 6, and April 13 and 14 were spent in Galveston. The show moved north playing Houston, Beaumont, Waxahatchie, Dallas, Ft. Worth, and on the 30th exhibited in Gainsville. The show then played in Indian and Oklahoma Territories, Oklahoma City, May 11, Springfield, Missouri, May 18, and Lamar, Missouri, on the 19th.

Ft. Scott on Wednesday, May 20, was the first exhibition in Kansas. The advance car arrived on the 14th, posted its bills and provided the newspapers with hand-outs. Newspaper ads appeared every day except Sunday touting the Ben Hur Herd of Arabian Stallions; 100 Beautiful Performing Shetland Ponies; the only troupes of Salambo and Scotch Collie Dogs ever exhibited in America; the marvelous Belfords, Europe's Most Famous Troupe of Lilliputian Acroats; A Bevy of Mirth-Provokers, Clowns and Funny Fellows; Watch for the Big Free Street Parade Daily; Show Grounds at Eighth and National Avenue.

The two leading Ft. Scott papers, the *Tribune* and the *Monitor*, ran the hand-outs provided by the show's press department and the same stories appeared over and over in the

Part II Season of 1903 By Orin C. King

Kansas dates. There was a sentimental report of the monkey mothers' love for the show's numerous monkey babies. "A Laudable Enterprise" extolled the virtues and beauties of the horses, ponies and burros the show carried. Another story generally captioned "Dog Sausage" recounted the act in which monkeys put dogs in a sausage grinder and long strings of sausage links came out. In an age when public drunkenness, even in Kansas, was a common event and was frequently considered amusing, the show provided a story of how the monkeys found a bottle of whiskey, got drunk and "staggered like their human brothers, chattered like mad, and finally fell asleep full as goats." "The Monkey Cook" concerned a monkey who, after watching the cook pluck a chicken, grabbed a trained rooster and attempted to pull out his feathers. The bird made such a noise that the employees came running and saved him from the frying pan.

time of chauvinism. It was an era in which any red-blooded American boy could whip five of those decadent Europeans, as was so well proven by the recent war with Spain. The story, in part, "America is the acknowledged home of originality. We led all the world in the matter of producing new ideas, infusing new blood, new energy into every undertaking, and the public, alive to the fact, is constantly demanding the novelties. Something new is the cry in every walk of life on this side of the big pond . . . A clean wholesome performance, the product of money, brains, originality, and American ingenuity. Will exhibit at Ft. Scott on May 20."

The Floto show at Ft. Scott came in five days behind the Cole Younger & Frank James Historical Wild West which had played the town on May 15. The Wild West show was a notorious collection of bandits. When the Floto show was in Springfield, Missouri, a gang from the Younger-James aggregation went through the Floto train and stole several gold watches, money and anything else of value that they could get their hands on. For the Floto people five days was close enough.

On show day the *Ft. Scott Monitor*



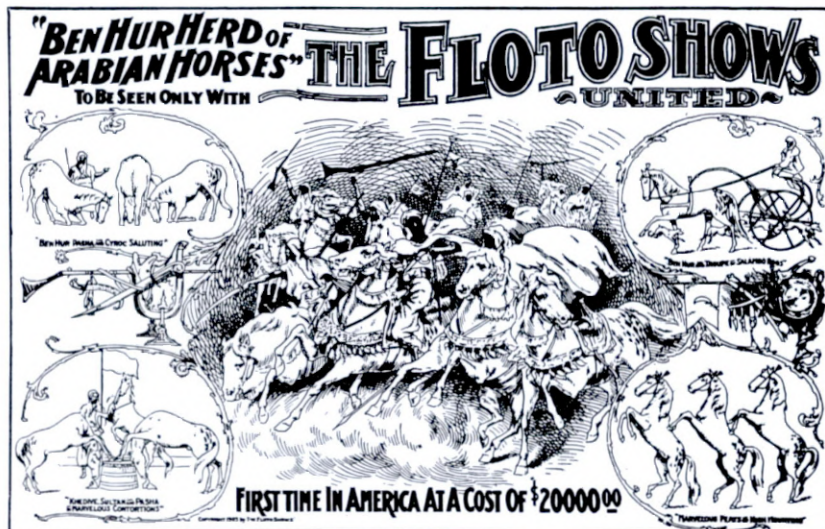
A fine stand of paper on the banks of the Kansas River at the peak of the flood in Lawrence, 1903. The flooding was even more disastrous in Topeka, where the show was stranded for at least twelve days. Douglas County Historical Society, Lawrence, Kan.

In a different vein was the story entitled "American Brains." The early twentieth century in America was a

ran a story lauding the show and the parade, which was written by the show's press agent, Joe Rickard. The same phrases and paragraphs were used on show day in several Kansas towns. In his story Rickard did not spare himself and wrote, "Joe Rickard, the advertising manager of this show, who has spent much of his life in the training of animals and in managing shows of all kinds, is one of

the most courteous young men on the road. His show is a good one and the flattering press comments they receive are only a just reward for the time expended in the training."

Chief of Police Mendenhall was instrumental in getting the show at least a full column of free advertising. In a crowded block near the end of the parade two clowns got into a fight directly in front of the chief. His efforts to separate the combatants brought cheers and laughter from the audience. In desperation he seized one fighter and dragged him into the jail. Only a few minutes later the fighter was released and rejoined the parade with his fighting friend. The whole affair was a put-on and the crowd had a good laugh over the way the Chief was taken in. The next day the papers wondered if Mendenhall had not been in on it from the beginning, but he said nothing. The same play was used in other towns all season long.



After the parade it rained so hard that the matinee was cancelled. The night performance was packed, hundreds had to stand. The *Monitor* reported that "the show was a good one," but lamented the absence of Lockhart's elephants which had been the featured act the year before. The show left town on the Frisco for Pittsburg, by way of Parsons, on its way to a Missouri stand on the 21st. The following day the show returned to Kansas for an exhibition Friday, May 22, at Pittsburg.

The *Pittsburg Daily Headlight* was stingy with its columns and did not use any of the advance hand-outs provided by the show. On show day the paper carried Joe Rickards' story "The Best On the Road" word for word as it appeared in the *Ft. Scott Monitor* with two exceptions—the parade time was changed to 12 o'clock and Rickards' name was misspelled. The *Headlight* ran the show's new style ad, four

columns wide for five days before the exhibition. The ad, which is reproduced elsewhere in this article, regarding the Topeka date, is a well designed professional job which would be a credit to any of the big circuses. Nothing unusual occurred in Pittsburg. There are no reports on the size of the crowds. Apparently it was a circus day satisfactory to all.

Following Pittsburg the show moved over the Santa Fe to Chanute, Saturday, May 23. Unloading began about six o'clock at the Main Street crossing attracting a large crowd. S.W. Brisbois, contracting agent in charge of advertising car No. 2 had arrived on the 18th, papered the town and secured a lot south of Jones' grove where Gentry Brothers had played the year before. Many shows with only one advertising car had an aversion to the use of No. 1, preferring to designate the advertising car as No. 2 in an attempt to fool the public into think-

The Pittsburg date saw the first use of this ad in Kansas. From *Topeka State Journal*, May 23, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

ing the show larger than it really was.

Publicity in the *Chanute Tribune* was niggardly with only one hand-out being published. This was a description of Pike's Peak Joe, a bucking burro for which the show offered a prize to any boy that could ride him. The show ran a large two-column ad without illustrations for four days before the exhibition.

Owing to the bad condition of the streets, the parade on Chanute's Main Street at eleven o'clock was a disappointment, consisting only of the manager's carriage and one band wagon. The *Tribune* reported an appreciative matinee audience composed mostly of children and went on to state, "All the ponies appeared to be well trained, much better so than in

the ordinary dog and pony show, while the acts assumed a much wider latitude and variety than usually seen. The drilling of an army of ponies and the rendering of "Home Sweet Home" by bells attached to their headgear, evoked a storm of applause from the younger portion of the spectators." The *Tribune* carried no review of the evening performance.

Business in Iola, Monday, May 25, was hurt by the appearance earlier in the month of two other shows. The Louella Forepaugh Fish Wild West Show had played on the 15th, but more damaging was the exhibition of Gentry Brothers, another dog and pony show, on May 20.

The Floto Shows, United, arrived in Iola on Sunday, the 24th and set up their tents on the east side of town at an unspecified location. The show ran only two newspaper ads for the date, one on the 19th and the other on the 24th, four columns wide, the same ad used in Pittsburg and later in Topeka. The *Iola Daily Register* used three of the show's hand-outs, two of which were "Dog Sausage" and "Monkey Got Drunk." The third story which was headlined "A Local Holiday" stated, "The event of the Floto shows has been made so interesting to the young as well as old that the schools are being dismissed to give the little tots an opportunity to attend the afternoon performance."

The only belittling aspect of this magnificent gesture made on the 20th regarding the exhibition of the 25th was the fact that school was dismissed for the summer on the 22nd. It was a cheap shot used again in Emporia.

The *Register* described the parade in a peculiar manner. "The parade at 11 o'clock was witnessed by a large crowd and while there were no striking features about it the exhibition looked business-like." The "Big Free Street Parade," the "grand street parade" was "business-like!"

A clown driving a mule hitched to a cart drew a large crowd when he stopped on the street car tracks. In traditional mulish manner the animal refused to move despite the pleadings and threats of its master. The cart remained on the tracks until a street car shoved up behind it, at which point the clown jumped on the mule's back and away they went accompanied by peels of laughter.

In its review of the show printed the next day, the *Register* said, "A fair-sized audience witnessed the Otto Floto show both afternoon and evening yesterday. It was clean and entertaining, but suffered in point of interest to most of the audience from the fact that the program and features are almost identical with the Gentry show which was here but a week ago. The three Arabian stallions, handsome,

gentle and well trained, were an excellent feature. When the three big horses stood up, resting their forefeet on the other's hips, it brought a cheer. The dogs and ponies were well trained, but the program offered little different from the Gentry show."

Advance car No. 2 arrived in Garnett on the 18th from Pittsburg to bill the town for an exhibition Tuesday, May 26. The *Garnett (Kansas) Evening News* called it "about the swellest thing of the kind on wheels." Continuing, the *News* reported, "The exterior is fresh and bright with new paint and artistically lettered. The interior is divided into two compartments one of which is nicely fitted up for office purposes, the other containing neatly built lockers for advertising matter, etc. The whole car is neat, clean and convenient and in pleasing contrast to the sway-back delapidated affairs so often used for the purpose. Mr. S.W. Brisbois, agent for the show, is a gentleman who does business in a business-like way, and is a worthy

This ad appeared for the Floto Shows in the *Wichita Daily Beacon*, July 22, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

THE

FLOTO SHOWS

UNITED

The Tallest Elephant in the Season. A Millionaire Collection of World-famous Acts and Features, Introducing the

Ben Hur Herd of Arabian Stallions

ACKNOWLEDGED THE

MOST MAGNIFICENT HORSE ACT IN THE WORLD

100 Cute Shetland Ponies 100

Only troupe of PERFORMING SALAMBO DOGS in America

The Success of Two Continents

THE RICCABONNI ACT

Baffling Description. So Wonderful as to Border on the Miraculous

100 REGISTERED BENCH SHOW DOGS 100

50 MONKEY ACTORS 50

Europe's Most Marvellous Lilliputian Acrobatic Family

...THE BELFORDS

Funny Clowns. Eccentric Comedians

Scrotesque Fun Makers

The Most Magnificently Equipped Show of Its Kind in the World

Watch for the Big Daily Street Parade

Mammoth Tents Will Be Located

Corner 13th and Topeka Avenue



WICHITA TWO DAYS

July 27 and 28

Price 20 and 30 Cents

representative of an organization which bears a good reputation."

The *Garnett (Kansas) Journal* ran only one of Brisbois' hand-outs, "Monkey Babies," but the *Evening News* was more receptive, using three stories and running a four column ad for five days preceding the exhibition. The story regarding the Ben Hur Herd of three Arabian stallions "imported directly from the stables of the Sultan of Morocco" described the act as "the most beautiful horse act the world has ever seen, designed and trained for this organization by Mr. D.G. Markle." A story on show day which is reminiscent of the style of Joe Rickard states that, "these horses are leased from a wealthy Turkish horseman who would not sell them for any price."

Another story captioned "A Fortune in Dogs" stated, "In selecting material for their kennels only registered dogs were purchased. The long list includes imported French, German and Russian Poodles, Sky Terriers, English Bulls, a magnificent troupe of Scotch Collies; in fact, each and every dog in the list is a pedigreed beauty and many of them are the winners of American and foreign bench show prizes."

On show day the horse tents on the lot near the Santa Fe depot were open to all who wished to inspect the animals. The parade featured the Ben Hur stallions and was enjoyed by a large crowd.

The day after the show the *Evening News* reported that large audiences saw a good performance. "Their ponies are beautiful, their performers clever, their clowns amusing. They gave the regular first class show performance, beside a number of high class novelties which pleased the audience immensely. The children especially enjoyed the ride on the ponies at the after show."

The review concluded with a statement that was becoming common and was offered with sincerity, "The Floto shows will be welcomed when they visit us again."

The next date was Lawrence, Wednesday, May 27. Newspaper advertising began on the 21st and ads appeared in all Lawrence papers except the *Daily World*. The ads for this date contained the first mention of the Riccabonni Act featuring a cart eight feet in height drawn by a black stallion. While the cart was moving three Scotch collies made a figure eight through the wheels and the Salambo collies made a figure eight between the hind legs of the stallion. This graceful performance charmed the crowds with its simple beauty.

The advent of the Floto Shows (or was it the advent of Joe Rickards?) reminded the *Daily Gazette* and also the *Daily World* that Prof. Dyche at

the University of Kansas was mounting the skeleton of a baby elephant which had belonged to the Floto Shows. The bones were those of Tom-Tom who had died the year before at Kansas City. The unassembled skeleton is still at the University in the Museum of Natural History.

Of special interest is a brief paragraph carried in the *Daily Gazette* on show day, the 27th. "H.H. Tammen, owner of the *Denver Post* and one of the proprietors of the Floto shows, came in from Denver this morning to be with the show for a few days." None of the other Lawrence papers contain any mention of Tammen's visit and the *Gazette* reported nothing further. The absence of additional information is cause to doubt the veracity of the story for it seem incredible that newspaper men in a small town would not be stimulated by the presence of a genuine publishing tycoon. Further doubts are raised by the absence of any mention of Tammen in the Topeka papers, considering the catastrophe that struck there.

The crowds at the performances were described as large. One of the features of the performance was Dina, the piano playing baboon. According to a press hand-out, "Dina takes a great interest in her music, and what she lacks in technique she makes up in the vigor of her performance."

"Biddy," a monkey rider of bucking

The Ben Hur herd was sometimes called "steeds of the black eagle feather" due to the feather-like markings over the hips. *Sterling Bulletin*, July 10, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

The Floto Shows.

America's Greatest Tented Show.



INTRODUCING
THE BEN HUR HERD OF ARABIAN STALLIONS.

The Largest Herd of Arabian Ponies in America.

More JUVENILE ACTOR-BATS than all others combined.

A WHOLE TROUPE OF FUNNY CLOWNS.

Sterling, Thursday, July 23.

Prices 20 and 30 cents.

WATCH FOR THE PARADE.

donkeys, tired of show business and ran away just as she was to go on. She was still at large when the show moved on. The men who were left behind to make the capture found her on the lot in the morning trying to escape a pack of dogs. "Biddy" was taken to Topeka on the morning local.

The night before the Lawrence exhibition the town was hit by a heavy rain. The entire month of May had been a series of violent downpours. When the show was not operating in rain during its Kansas dates, it was struggling through a sea of mud. The *Lawrence Daily World* on the 27th reported, "The river (Kansas) was higher this morning than it has been this spring and a great quantity of driftwood is going over the dam." On the 28th the show moved up-river to Topeka.

Newspaper publicity for the Topeka dates, Thursday and Friday, May 28 and 29, began on the 21st with a brief mention in the *Topeka State Journal* that "the Otto Floto dog and pony show will be in Topeka May 28—a week from today." None of the Topeka papers used the hand-outs that had served the show so well in other cities, but the coverage received was sympathetic, and, to the circus fan, entertaining as well as informative.

The *Journal* on the 29th reported that the tent could seat 3,800 and that the show on six railroad cars carried 40 trained dogs, 76 trained ponies and 90 people.

The *Journal* carried an ad one day only, May 23. The *Topeka Daily Capital* had ads on the 27th and 28th while the *Daily Herald* ran ads May 25, 26, 27 and 28. The *Herald* was the newest paper in town, and possibly had lower rates.

The tents were pitched on a lot between Adams and Jefferson Streets on Ninth, near the Santa Fe tracks. The parade was held just before noon and, according to the *Journal*, consisted of "Three fine Arabian horses, several cages of monkeys, two bands and a family of acrobats."

"But the piece de resistance of the parade was the water wagon and so many were riding on it that they nearly fell off from being so crowded. There wasn't room for more. The passengers on the water wagon were clowns."

For seven weeks the Floto Shows had battled mud and rainy weather in Texas, Indian Territory, Oklahoma and in all of its Kansas dates, but Topeka was the climax. Rain began in the afternoon of the 28th and continued most of the night. The Weather Bureau recorded 1.71 inches of rain on the 29th.

The *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 29, reported, "Yesterday the rain and mud again interfered seriously with the day's business. Business yesterday at



This cartoon was also used in Wichita. In Topeka it ran four columns by four and one half inches. From *Topeka State Journal*, July 25, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

both performances was miserable. There were not enough people at the evening performance to start a game of progressive pinochle." The *Journal* was of the opinion that, "For some reason the Floto shows seems to be appropriately named. Floto sounds as if it might mean something about floods and high water."

There are no reports of business for the 29th because the public and the press were busy with the greatest catastrophe to date in the history of Topeka. The night of the 29th the Kansas River left its banks flooding all of North Topeka making 6,000 unprepared people suddenly homeless. With the flood came a drop in temperature. The maximum for May 31 was 47 degrees and the minimum 44. The city water supply was contaminated.

The Belford Troupe appeared with the Floto Shows in 1903. They were from California and had appeared with the Norris & Rowe Circus in prior years. Pfening Archives.



The Santa Fe, Union Pacific and Rock Island were all out of business. The only rail link left was the Missouri Pacific branch line to the south. The Floto Shows sat on its train in the Santa Fe yards with water up to the axles and no place to go.

No one knows how many people were rescued by small boats in Topeka's night of terror and no one knows how many heroes have gone unsung, but the *Daily Herald* reported on June 1 on two daring men whose rescue efforts earned them a place in the annals of the city.

"F. Egner and D.G. Markle of the Floto show, water bound here, did heroic work yesterday afternoon among the rescue crew. Egner is a fine specimen of physical manhood and Markle, though not a large man, is of the wiry, muscular build and cool temperament that is quick to discern and act. Both were good swimmers. They attempted to replace a broken cable north of Krauss' harness store, and were almost successful when their boat was swamped, and then they were warned to desist owing to the crumbling condition of the buildings where the current was swiftest. These men worked faithfully and hard in the work of assisting

the rescuers until so benumbed with cold that they were forced to quit."

Others from the Floto Shows whose names were not reported also did their part in the disaster. The city fathers remembered their efforts when the show returned to Topeka in July.

According to the *Journal*, "D.H. Markle, the dog and pony trainer of the Floto shows began in the business with another show four and a half years ago and \$4.50 per week washing dogs and ponies. Now he receives \$100 a week and he and his wife travel in a state room on the circus train."

Two employees, Harry Ashley and Roy Smith, jumped the show in Topeka. These two, in their late teens, left the farm because the work was too hard and dull and joined the show at Iola, May 25, for a life of tinsel and excitement. They reported to the free employment agency in Topeka seeking easier jobs. Show biz was not what it seemed to be. Smith's hands were so sore and blistered that he needed help in signing his name. Cured of their romantic notions, they were placed on a farm near Wakarusa.

The scope of the flood of 1903 in Topeka was tremendous. With a population of approximately 35,000, one out of every six persons was homeless. Separated families spent days seeking each other. Most of the refugees had only the clothes on their backs. The financial loss was measured by hundreds of thousands of dollars, but a greater loss was the 30 who died of drowning or prolonged exposure to the weather. With the water works flooded, the city was lucky in escaping the predicted typhoid epidemic.

It was a time of wagon transport and many of the dirt roads were impassable because of mud and water. Through service on the Rock Island, Union Pacific and Santa Fe was totally disrupted. The only avenue for emergency food and supplies for several days was the Missouri Pacific branch to Lomax. The Rock Island on the north side of the river had a line from St. Joseph, Missouri, to the water's edge but its bridge to the south side was closed until June 4.

The Santa Fe by June 4 was running three trains a day to Emporia. The Union Pacific had no service whatsoever.

All available rail service was needed to move all of the things the city needed so desperately. There was neither time nor equipment to move a show train. The Floto show was stranded in Topeka until the 8th or 9th of June when near normal traffic was resumed. The show's route on file at the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin, prepared by Ted Bowman, lists the Floto Shows in Topeka on June 9. The next five days are unaccounted for with the show

reported in Denver on the 15th. The Topeka papers fail to mention its departure. The *Journal* on June 10 states, "If the Otto Floto dog show has found a dry region there are people in Topeka who would like to know about it."

Floto Shows

THE TRICKS OF THE RING, A MILLION-DOLLAR COLLECTION
THE HUR HERD OF ARABIAN STALLIONS
100 CUTE SHETLAND PONIES
THE RICCARBONNI ACT
50 MONKEY ACTORS
The Belfords
FUNNY CLOWNS
EXCITING COMEDIANS
GROUPEUSE FUN MAKERS

GARDEN CITY, KAN.
One Big Day
MONDAY, JULY 20

Popular Prices. Two Shows, Rain or Shine.

The clowns were frequently used to illustrate a hand-out extolling the excellence of the Floto funny fellows. From *Garden City Herald*, July 4, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

Among the known blown dates are Leavenworth, Saturday, May 30, Atchison, Monday, June 1, and Hiawatha, Tuesday, June 2. On May 20, the *Atchison Weekly Champion* ran a story extolling in extravagant terms the coming of the Forepaugh-Sells Brothers circus. In the second paragraph of the same story the *Weekly Champion* referred to the Floto Shows. "The next attraction billed for Atchison, appearing here next week, is a little dinky one that was here last season, and showed at the corner of 8th and Commercial. A wagon load of dogs and monkeys comprised the animal, as well as all other features of the show. It will be remembered that at the night performance at that time the seats fell down and George Daily had a leg broken and many others were injured besides. There will not be as much excitement on the streets as there was when the street roller arrived."

The *Hiawatha Kansas Democrat* made no comment on the cancelled date.

The season of 1903 was peculiar in that it was nearly two seasons in one, the dividing point being the first Topeka date. After Topeka, a new feeling radiates from the newspaper accounts. There is an aura of success about the show. A feeling is generated that the show is established, secure in a brilliant future. Topeka in May was a watershed for the Floto Shows, United.

After the Denver closing on June 20 nothing is known of the route, except for Greeley on the 22nd, until the show appeared in Garden City, Kansas, Monday, July 20.

The new image of the show emerged slowly. The first two dates in Kansas were unimpressive, but thereafter day by day the show increased in stature.

Six of the press department hand-outs appeared in the *Garden City Herald*. The ad for Garden City, July 20, ran three days only, July 4, 11 and 18. No review of the show was printed. The *Garden City Imprint* ran a different ad on the same three days as the *Herald*. The *Imprint* disposed of the show in two sentences. "The Floto show exhibited here Monday. The performance was fairly good and was well attended."

Dodge City on Tuesday, July 21, drew faint praise. The *Dodge City Democrat* also ran a two sentence review on the 24th stating that, "The Floto Show came on time last Tuesday and drew a good crowd. There was some disappointment to many who anticipated more of a show." Newspaper ads appeared on July 3, 10 and 17. The *Democrat* carried none of the show's hand-outs but did in a small story of one paragraph mention the Ben Hur Herd, the Belford's gymnastics and the pure white double-humped camels. The thermometer registered 103 on show day.

Newspaper advertising for Wednesday, July 22, at Great Bend began in the *Great Bend Register* on July 9. The *Great Bend Tribune* advertised the Ben Hur Herd on the 10th and the 17th, while the *Great Bend Daily Item* carried on July 11, 15, 17 and 18 the same ad that had appeared in the *Register*. Mentioned in advertising for the first time were the Musical Meltons, "America's greatest quartette of musicians, 2 ladies; 2 gentlemen."

In the *Great Bend Daily Item*, July 16, there appeared for the first time in Kansas an essay by Paul Thieman entitled "The Circus Beautiful," a phrase exploited by Sells-Floto for many years.

Thieman wrote: "My impression of the Floto shows was that it was very pretty and that all the fashionable ladies and smiling men and happy children thought it pretty, too."

"And it suddenly dawned upon me that the circus could be beautiful, something I had never suspected, and then it dawned upon me that everybody else was thinking that very same thing, too."

"And so I enjoyed myself and felt amused over the idea that I could have lived all this time and seen so many shows and never thought of the circus beautiful before, and it struck me that the laughing, delighted audience that I mingled with, going home, was thinking so, too."

"My imagination did not conceive of the tent and ring as beautiful. And why shouldn't they be beautiful? No reason on earth except that nobody thought of it before.

"There's lots of queer ideas in this world, but the queerest is that one must entertain with hideous things. What enterprising boy has not thought of the circus wherein all the performers would be boys and girls and dreamed it all over again in his sleep—a jeweled, fairy circus with tiny, prancing steeds, Arabian horses and an audience of fairies and angels?

"A circus garlanded with flowers and its air laden with delicate perfumes, sparkling, roseate, shimmering, now silvered, now golden—the circus of the child's dream."

And on and on for eight more paragraphs.

The *Great Bend Register* described the parade as "very good." In sharp disagreement with the papers of Garden City and Dodge City was the brief comment on the show published by the *Great Bend Tribune* on the 24th:

"The Floto shows Wednesday were well attended and for a trained animal show was the best we have ever had here. The acts were all extremely good and it is evident that they were enjoyed."

Publicity for the Sterling date Thursday, July 23, began with the stock story on the Ben Hur Herd published July 3 in the *Sterling Bulletin*. No other hand-outs were run. An ad featuring the Ben Hur stallions ran twice, July 10 & 17. No review of the show was printed.

On its second swing through Kansas the advance was functioning smoothly. The first time around publicity ran from four days ahead at Pittsburg to eight days at Garnett with an average lead of six. The return route had a lead of thirteen days at Great Bend to twenty days at Sterling, Emporia and Topeka for an average of 16 days advance. Missing from the newspaper columns was the name of S.W. Brisbois.

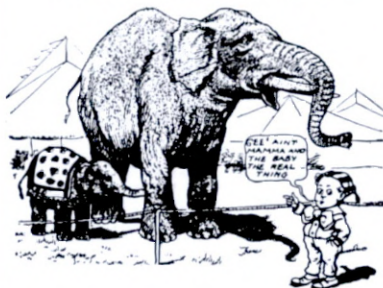
Joe Rickard, sometimes spelled Reckard, appeared in the news in situations where the name of Brisbois was formerly found. Rickard was popular with the newsmen. For the date at Hutchinson Friday, July 24, Rickard placed stories in all four of the town's papers using a total of 12 different hand-outs. The *Hutchinson Weekly News*, July 9, ran a story on the press agent himself under the headline "Reckard's a Talker."

"Joe Reckards, the advance press agent with the Floto shows, which will be here on July 24, was in town yesterday and called at the News office to see the boys. Reckards is one of the very busiest men in a conversation, but his stuff is all good and interesting. He talks considerably about the

magnificent things to be seen when the big show comes to town and he has a fund of talk to last the season around."

Emporia, Kansas

Wednesday, JULY 29.



THE FLOTO SHOWS

The Tamed Spirit of the Beast. A Millionaire Collection of World-famed
Rare and Features, Introducing the

Ben Hur Herd of Arabian Stallions

ACKNOWLEDGED THE
MOST MAGNIFICENT HORSE ACT IN THE WORLD

100 Cute Shetland Ponies 100

Only troupe of **PERFORMING SALAMBO DOGS** in America

The Success of Two Continents

The RICOCAONI ACT

Nothing Described. So Wonderful as to Border on the Miraculous

100 REGISTERED BENCH SHOW DOGS 100

50 MONKEY ACTORS 50

Europe's Most Marvellous Lili-
pulan Acrobatic Family

... THE BELFORDS

Funny Clowns. Eccentric Comedians

Grotesque Fun Makers

The Most Magnificently Equipped Show of Its Kind in the World

Watch for the Big Daily Street Parade



PRICES: 20c and 30c

Despite the inference, there were no elephants with the Floto Shows in 1903. Dina played her piano with vigor at every performance. From *Emporia Gazette*, July 20, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

One of the stories Rickard landed in the *Hutchinson Daily Bee* with a large illustration concerned the latest addition to the menagerie. The show had recently acquired two "pure white" double-humped camels which Rickard

called "the swiftest breed of riding camels known, are called 'El Heirilie.'"

Identical advertisements appeared in all of the Hutchinson papers and contained a cartoon of two elephants, one large and the other a baby. In none of the hand-outs or reviews of the show is there any mention of elephants. One reviewer lamented the absence of the Lockhart elephants. The only supportable conclusion is that in 1903 the show carried none.

The *Hutchinson Daily Bee* on show day ran an interesting story based on a conversation with D.G. Markle. Markle reported that the physical plant of the show represented \$75,000. All of the dogs were not thoroughbreds of bench quality as the usual publicity claimed. One Scotch collie, which was running loose on the streets of Chicago, was purchased for five dollars. The story also states, and the source must have been Markle, that the Ben Hur Herd reported to be on loan from a Turkish nobleman in some stories and belonging to the Sultan of Morocco in other tales, was purchased at the winter horse show in Chicago.

The *Hutchinson Semi-Weekly Gazette* was pleased with the performance, especially the opening drill of 12 ponies named for the months of the year; the little dog that climbed a ladder and jumped into a blanket; and the family of acrobats. "The two younger ones of the lot were much smaller than are often found doing such tumbling, and this made the acting very interesting." The tent was pitched behind the Santa Fe hotel. Prices, 20 and 30 cents. The *Daily Bee* estimated the evening crowd at 1,500. The monkey strapped in the little car looping-the-loop was in some towns called a monkey, in others a baboon, but in the Hutchinson newspaper ads it was promoted to "The Mankiller Gorilla."

Newspaper publicity for the Newton date Saturday, July 25, began two weeks before the exhibition. The show unloaded at the Main Street crossing and erected the tents at East Fifth and Pine Streets. The *Newton Evening Kansan-Republican* in reporting the parade at eleven o'clock said, "The wagons, uniforms and other equipment were clean and bright and apparently new. The cages contained monkeys, dogs and baboons. The horses were well kept and fine looking, especially the Shetland ponies. The regulation band of eight over-worked musicians headed the procession and a clown band was fastened to the other end."

The *Kansan-Republican* on page one on the 27th ran the following:

"The Floto Show that was in this city Saturday, although not the largest, was one of the cleanest and best of the kind Newtonians have ever

TOPEKA, July 30 and 31.
TWO SHOWS DAILY.
Mammoth Tents Will Be Located Cor. 9th and Jefferson Sts.



FLOTO SHOWS

The United States of America, a Billions of Dollars of World-famous
Horse and Circus, including the

Ben Hur Herd of Arabian Stallions
ACKNOWLEDGED THE
MOST MAGNIFICENT HORSE ACT IN THE WORLD

100 CUTE Shetland Ponies 100
Daily Shows of PERFORMING SALAMANDER DOGS in America

The Success of Two Continents
The RICCABONNI ACT
Selling Descriptions. See Wanted Ad to Editor of the BEACON

100 REGISTERED BENCH SHOW DOGS 100
50 MONKEY ACTORS 50
Comes the Best! Marvellous Locomotion Acrobatic Family ... **THE BELFORDS**

Funny Clowns. Eccentric Comedians
Grotesque Fun Makers

The Most Magnificently Equipped Show of its Kind in the World
Watch for the Big Daily Street Parade



PRICES: 30c and 50c.

seen. The animals had a sleek and well-kept appearance and the equipment was new and in good condition. While many old tricks were performed and interspersed with new attractions, principal among which was the playing of 'Home Sweet Home' by the 'musical ponies' and the looping of the loop by the baboon, both of which were excellent. The Arabian horses won the admiration of the audience by their intelligence as did also the Shetland ponies with their cunning tricks. The acrobatic family of six persons were thought by many to be the best performers of their kind ever seen in Newton. In all, the performance was a meritorious one and those who had dealings with the company report that the proprietors adhere strictly to business principles."

Newspaper publicity for the Wichita dates Monday and Tuesday, July 27 and 28, began 13 days ahead of the exhibition. Both the *Wichita Morning Eagle* and the *Daily Beacon* were liberal with their columns. The *Eagle* ran 10 of Rickard's hand-outs and the *Beacon* used two. In addition to the hand-outs the *Beacon* carried four original stories that were actually news. The ridiculous story of the origins of Otto Floto appeared in the *Eagle*. Both papers used cartoons provided by the show. One in the *Eagle* captioned "Tomorrow Is Circus Day" was four columns wide and used again for the Topeka dates. The *Beacon* used a clever cartoon showing the animals leaving the Ark with a monkey looping the loop down a giraffe's neck and an elephant's trunk and around a loop formed by a snake.

The jump from Newton to Wichita was only 25 miles and the show arrived in Wichita early Sunday morning. The set-up at 13th and Topeka Avenue was a leisurely affair. The day was not so leisurely for the band. Akin to the postman on a Sunday stroll or the sailor rowing in Central Park, the band played two concerts on their day of rest. The show band combined with Wichita's Sanford band for a program at 4:15 p.m. in North Riverside park and another in the evening. The night concert on College Hill drew a crowd estimated at 1,000 people who in the

The cut on the left, the Riccabonni Act, was sometimes used alone with only the date. From *Garden City Herald*, July 4, 1903. Kansas State Historical Society.

cool breezes listened to "some of the best music ever heard in Wichita."

Following the evening performance on the 27th the Sanford band entertained the show's musicians with a smoker in the Sanford club rooms. The *Eagle* remarked, "They found the Otto Floto boys a jolly set of fellows and spent a very pleasant evening." Three men of the Floto band were already members of the musicians' union and six other joined in Wichita.

The *Eagle* ran a glowing review of the show repeating all the nice things that other papers had said about the show. The *Beacon* treated the show more like a source of news, reporting that on Tuesday night the young son of R.F. Washburn got too close to a cage of monkeys and was bitten on the hand. The cost to the show was \$75. The matinee contained a surprise act which was not down on the bill and the *Beacon* gave it a good play.

The surprise was initiated by two black children, Victoria Cole, age nine, and her eight year old brother, Buddie. The children found a horse and buggy in an alley and decided to ride to the show. On the way they picked up three of their friends. Finding the buggy a bit crowded they abandoned it and hitched the horse to a wagon. The owner of the horse found it at the circus and called the police. The children were found inside the tent watching the show. When Officers Gangwish and Grant attempted to take them into custody the children jumped from their seats and ran. Chased by the police they ran around the hippodrome track and through the rings with a clown joining the pursuit. The audience, thinking it part of the performance, roared with laughter. The children suddenly scattered and dove under the sidewall. Gangwish and Grant continued the race outdoors and finally caught both Victoria and Buddie. The owner of the horse was satisfied with a dollar from the children's mother and they were released after a lecture from the judge.

Joe Rickard, Reckard, Rickhart—the papers of 1903 were careless with the spelling of names—appeared in the offices of the *Emporia Gazette* July 9, three weeks ahead of the date, July 29. In speaking of Rickhart (sic) the *Gazette* said, "The visit of an advance agent of a show to a newspaper office is always as welcome an event as that of the drummer to the cross roads store. In addition to making a fat advertising contract they always have lots of good stories to tell."

The *Emporia Daily Republican* used 10 of Rickard's hand-outs and the *Gazette* ran eight, all of which had been used in other towns, such as "Monkey Got Drunk," "Monkey Cook," "Dog Sausage," "American Brains," "Ben Hur Herd," etc. Both papers gave the show good reviews.

The *Gazette* on the 29th printed the following regarding the parade: "Procession was headed by the manager of the show in a red and gold cart drawn by a 'calico' pony. Following the boss was the band wagon and after the band wagon came six open cages containing specimens of animal life from the jungles, the desert, the forest and the plains. The herd of Arabian horses was also in the parade as well as the two wagon loads of trained dogs. There were two clowns which concluded the pageant."

According to the *Gazette*, Conductor Foot, brakemen Polly Smith and Harley Anderson, and engineer Becker brought the train from Newton to Emporia. "The railroad company had considerable trouble with the show company about getting a place to put its cars. There were three coaches and four flat cars in the train."

On July 10 the *Topeka State Journal* reported that J.H. Huston, general manager and J.E. Rickard, press agent, were in town making arrangements for a two-day stand, Thursday and Friday, July 30 and 31. All three of Topeka's daily papers were liberal with their columns and each ran several of Rickard's hand-outs plus a few original stories. A total of seven large ads was divided among the three papers.

A new departure in hand-outs was a story in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 19, under the heading "Daily Toilet of the Floto Shows' Dogs" which reproduced six photographs. Photos were not used in any other Kansas papers.

The ridiculous fictional family history of Otto Floto was further embellished and appeared in the *Topeka State Journal*, July 21. The following paragraph contains "information" not previously reported:

"When 16 years of age Otto, while at the University of Heidelberg, made a famous name for himself by allowing a lion to follow him all over the campus until the learned professors

objected. This so annoyed the boy that he left college bent on following the vocation of his ancestors."

And "Now that Otto has decided to make America his home his sole aim in life is to leave behind him an entertainment so grand that it will forever stand as a monument on American soil though his bones when the great judgement day arrives may be resting in the beautiful plot at Cassel far across the ocean with the rest of the von Flotow family." It will be remembered that Otto Floto was sports editor of the *Denver Post* and was born in Cincinnati, Ohio.

When the show played Topeka in May and became stranded in the flood several of the show people rendered brave and useful service to the city. The city fathers remembered and in

gratitude remitted the license for the July dates.

The parade on the 30th was given under threatening skies but the rain held off until after the procession. The lot was at Ninth and Jefferson Streets. Attendance the first night was estimated by the *Topeka Daily Herald* at about 1,500. The only differences between the performances in May and July noted by the newspapers were the improved smoothness of the pony acts and the addition of Kiro, the monkey-baboon-gorilla, that looped the loop in a tiny automobile. All three papers gave the show good reviews and only the *Herald* had any complaint. The *Herald* closed its account by stating "The show closed with a whacking stick act with table and barrel stunt variations which ought to have been omitted. It was not

up to the excellence of the rest of the show."

The Topeka dates completed the Floto Shows double tour of Kansas. From Topeka the show probably went into Missouri and is known to have exhibited in Carrollton, Missouri, on the 4th of August. Topeka was not the only town played twice in 1903 for second appearances were made in Dallas, Marshall, Beaumont, Galveston and Houston, Texas, closing the season with a repeat performance at Ft. Worth, November 21.

Research funded in part by grants from:

*Wolfe's Camera Shops, Inc.,
Topeka Kansas
First National Bank of Topeka,
Kansas*

The 1983 CHS Convention

Plans continue to progress for the 1983 Circus Historical Society convention to be held in Akron, Ohio, on September 1-4 in conjunction with the nearby appearance of Carson & Barnes Circus during the Labor Day weekend.

With the dwindling number of tent shows, it is appropriate that the CHS hold its 1983 convention in conjunction with one of America's largest tent shows and the only big show to still regularly play one-day stands. In addition, circus owner D.R. Miller is America's veteran showman, a now near-legendary individual who has owned a circus for the last 47 of his 67 years.

The CHS convention will be held at one of the most eastern stands to be played by Carson & Barnes in 1983. They plan a tour to California and the west and will not return to the mid-west until August 24-28 when they will be near Chicago and then head rapidly east to their Labor Day weekend engagement with the CHS convention near Akron, Ohio.

The convention hotel is the famous Quaker Square Hilton whose spacious and luxurious facilities have been built from old Quaker Oats grain silos. A complex of fine specialty shops, one of the world's largest miniature railroad displays, and seven old railroad cars, a steam engine and a caboose are all part of the fine facilities which will be available to CHS members staying at the Mobil-rated four-star hotel. Special room rates for CHS members are \$40 single and \$45 double occupancy.

The Akron area is serviced by both its own airport (USAir, United, Eastern) and by Cleveland's Hopkins airport. Frequent limousine service is

available from both airports to the hotel and a schedule is available from the convention chairman.

The tentative convention schedule has a "pre-show concert" of old circus films on Thursday evening, a luncheon and historical papers on Friday, circus day on Saturday, and additional programs and a banquet on Sunday. The banquet speaker will be Tom Parkinson, a former editor of *Billboard* who will recall his years from 1950 to 1961 on the staff of the "Showman's Bible." Registration is

Convention headquarters will be the unusual Quaker Square Hilton Inn, located in a former mill of the Quaker Oats Co., in Akron, Ohio. Special rates are available to convention goers.

\$38.50 and includes two meals and circus tickets (additional meal and circus tickets are available for family members).

Hotel and CHS convention registration forms will be available in a month's time for all members who are considering attending the annual national gathering. Join us in the fellowship of nearly 100 CHS members who have been attending the recent conventions. If you are considering attending the CHS convention, mail the enclosed mpst card to receive additional information or write to the convention chairman and CHS president, Richard W. Flint, P.O. Box 23574, L'Enfant Plaza Station, Washington, D.C. 20024.



CIRCUS WAGON HISTORY FILE

The W.C. Coup Steam Organ Wagon

by Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

One feature of many nineteenth century circuses were wagons mounted with mechanical or manually played organs and orchestrions which dispensed music in the menagerie and the street parade. All of the leading shows, including Barnum, Forepaugh and Cole had such organs, but little is known about the majority of them. One vehicle which survived in a modified state long enough to be recorded by the photographers is the wagon which originally housed a steam organ on the W.C. Coup United Monster Shows.

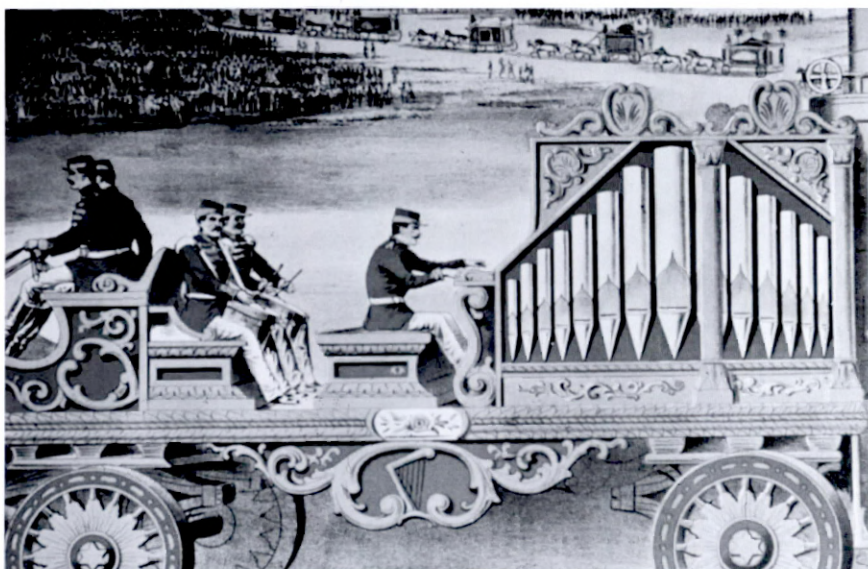
Lest anyone be misled by the misnomer "steam organ," it should be noted that these instruments were not a form of callopie, but air blown organs whose conventional bellows or blowers were powered by a small reciprocating steam engine. The smokestack denotes the presence of a steam boiler which supplied the steam only to run the engine.¹

The 1881 W.C. Coup courier emphasized its musical parade wagons. On the left is the organ wagon in its original configuration. The figures atop the two tableaux to its right are presumably automatons, a popular feature of the period. Original courier at Circus World Museum.

Coup first announced his intention to feature mechanical musical instruments in the March 1, 1879 *New York Clipper*. The John H. Murray circus of 1878 formed the basis of Coup's new show, and since there is no record of such a device on that show or on Coup's 1878 venture, it is presumed Coup had them built new or acquired

them from a secondhand source. Conceivably one of the vehicles may have been the Harmonicon from the P.T. Barnum circus. This wagon originated on the Coup-guided Barnum show of 1873, but for reasons unknown it

This 1876 lithograph depicts the steam organ used on the Barnum show. It may be the same wagon shown in the center background of the 1881 Coup courier. Original poster at American Antiquarian Society.



THE W. C. COUP NEW UNITED MONSTER SHOWS.

Part of Great Procession



Worth going 1000 Miles to See.

Four Gigantic Steam Power Musical Orpheodes, Equal to 1200 Skillful Musicians.

turned up in the hands of Chicago real estate agents Anson M. Truesdell and Edwin H. Brown in early 1877.² This particular vehicle is not our primary subject, however, as the Harmonicon reportedly had mirrored sides and recessed panels, the former not appearing on the subject Coup wagon.³

An 1881 Coup courier shows the larger features of the show's parade.⁴ The centerfold spread depicts five wagons, three carved tableau wagons and two steam organs. The smallest organ wagon, in the center, bears a close resemblance to a manually operated organ shown in an H.A. Thomas lithograph for the 1876 Barnum show.⁵ The other organ wagon is a heavily decorated affair, shown at least three times actual size. The decorations include carved corner images and scrolled posts dividing the wagon side into three sections. The two outside panels enclosed ranks of imitation metal organ pipes and the center contained a flared grouping of trumpet resonators and a horizontal female figure. The top of the wagon, which would have telescoped down into the body to reduce its height for loading on the train, consisted of two additional ranks of pipes surrounding a panel containing two figures and a base drum. The mudboard was also carved, the predominant decoration being two scrolls which swirled away from the center.

After Coup routed his show through Bridgeport in September 1881, Henry E. Bowser, the secretary of his former partner, P.T. Barnum, recorded the substance of Coup's parade in his diary. Bowser's entry of September 3 called the parade very small and cheap, but it contained a considerable number of units. Included were 33 to 35 cages, chariots [probably meaning tableau wagons], tally ho carriages, bandwagons, racing chariots, 24 horses with riders, three bands, four small elephants, four camels, one ancient coach (in gold), one open den and three steam music wagons.⁶

All was not well financially on the show, however, and Coup telegraphed Barnum on November 2, 1881, asking for an interview.⁷ If Coup met with Barnum and whether they discussed a partnership is not known, but on December 2, 1881 Barnum wrote his partners, James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson, advising them not to buy into Coup's operation.⁸ The following year Coup claimed Barnum had offered him \$200,000 for his show and a salary of \$25,000 for his name and services, an offer he certainly should have accepted.⁹ Coup may have had other partners at the time, an early 1882 *Clipper* reporting he had bought out the interests of W.J. Jukes, George Middleton, E.D. Colvin and Margaret L. Haight, the wife of Andrew Haight, and was now sole

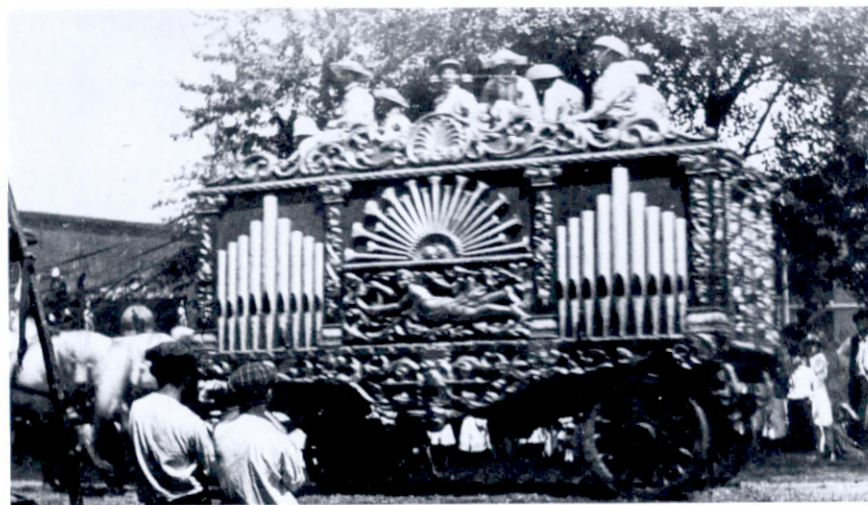


The former Coup organ wagon was used for the clown band after the Ringings reinstituted the Barnum and Bailey parade in 1908. Glasier photograph at Ringling Museum of the Circus.

owner.¹⁰ This go-it-alone posture could have required the sale of some assets, and in the January 14, 1882 *Clipper* Coup offered to sell two of his steam organs. Only one remained when a second ad was inserted in the February 11 issue, probably the big organ wagon featured in the 1881 courier engraving.

In 1882 the Coup show suffered through an early wet spell and a premature tour of Texas, only to incur a damaging wreck on August 20, 1882, between Tunnel Hill and New Burnside, forty-seven miles north of Cario, Illinois. The wreck demolished one sleeper, killing three wagon drivers and injuring over 20 other employees.¹¹ When the show reached Detroit on August 23 it was attached

An Oriental act rode the organ wagon in parade another season with Barnum and Bailey. Pfening Archives.



by several performers, including Frank Melville, William Ducrow and George Loyal, followed by a multitude of others. Their action sealed the fate of the circus. After the necessary preparations the circus properties were sold at auction on September 16, with the majority of major American showmen represented for the sale. The single remaining "magnificent" steam organ and its chariot were "sacrificed" for \$700 to R.J. Morgan, representing the lithographing firm of Russell & Morgan Printing Company, who was attending the auction with his partner, William Morgan.¹²

It is believed the same organ wagon was the one offered on November 6, 1882, at a sheriff's sale held at New York City. The offerings at that sale included "1 Magnificent Steam Chariot, containing first class mammoth steam organ. The organ guaranteed to be in perfect order."¹³ Other items offered in the sale list, including a Golden Napoleon coach, a Lord Mayor's coach and a Flying Machine, identify the properties to be those of the defunct Coup show. No account of this sale has been found, and the trail



of the last Coup organ wagon is temporarily lost.

Although the travels of the 1881 Coup courier organ wagon remain a mystery for ten years, it turns up on the Adam Forepaugh circus in the early 1890's. An adequate view of the right rear corner serves to identify its presence in a Forepaugh parade view taken at Bath, Maine, between 1890 and 1894.¹⁴ By this time the top pipe facade was replaced by a regular carved skyboard denoting the wagon's conversion to a tableau after removal of the organ.

The Forepaugh show was shelved after the 1894 tour and in 1896 the majority of the equipment was used to "mobilize" the Buffalo Bill's Wild West. In addition to the ex-Forepaugh Lion bandchariot, the former Coup organ wagon was also placed on the new show. Its early presence there is confirmed in a photograph of the Wild West parade taken on August 31, 1896 at Sheboygan, Wisconsin.¹⁵ The photograph confirms the complete removal of the old top pipe facade and the conversion into a conventional bandwagon with the addition of seating between the carved skyboards. Although confirmation is lacking, the wagon was probably used on the wild west through 1902, and was left at Bridgeport quarters when the show left for its European tour.

Returning from a five year tour of Europe, James A. Bailey incorporated the organ tableau into the Barnum & Bailey parade. Its presence on the 1903 show has not been documented, but since it appears in parade at Minneapolis, Minnesota on August 22, 1904, and at Waterloo, Iowa on August 27, 1904, it is quite likely to have also been on the 1903 tour.¹⁶ At this time it carried number 53 on the front. From 1905 to 1907 the Barnum & Bailey show did not parade, and the organ tableau was stored at Bridgeport with the remainder of the parade vehicles.

A Frederick Glasier photograph of a circa 1908 Barnum & Bailey parade indicates the organ tableau was again used after the parade was reinstituted in 1908.¹⁷ About this time it was renumbered 100, and was probably used on Barnum & Bailey through the final season of 1918. It is not known if the organ tableau was in the 1919 and 1920 parades of the combined show, but it was stored at Bridgeport until 1925. On December 31 of that year the organ tableau was one of twenty-one wagons sold to George

While on the Buffalo Bill Wild West, a cowboy band rode atop the wagon. Author's collection.

Christy. Christy moved the majority of the wagons he acquired to a storage lot at Fairfield, Connecticut, where they were abandoned until about 1932. Carvings from some of these wagons were salvaged, but no portion of the organ tableau's decoration is known to exist today.

A corollary to the Coup organ wagon's story is the history of Barnum & Bailey tableau 76/93, one of the few parade wagons used after 1900 which has not been given a nickname. It shared several common features with the Coup organ wagon, including the heavy carved pillars on the sides which wrapped around the corners. The narrow horizontal boards used to fill the front of the body is a detail not found on other wagons. Unfortunately its history cannot be traced prior to the earliest dateable view of it, taken at St. Paul, Minnesota on July 13, 1897.¹⁸ It is probable the tableau came to the Barnum & Bailey show in 1897, along with the Five Graces bandwagon from the defunct Forepaugh property. Its original number 76 was changed to 93 when the show was in England in late 1899. It remained a Barnum & Bailey parade fixture as late as 1917, when Ralph Miller recorded it in the October 8 march at Memphis, Tennessee.¹⁹ Its subsequent history remains a mystery.

Fred D. Pfening III, John Polacsek

Tableau 76/93 on parade in Berlin, Germany on the Barnum and Bailey tour of England and Europe. Note similarities between this wagon, and the former Coup organ vehicle, indicating a common origin. Author's collection.



and Stuart Thayer deserve a note of thanks for their contributions to this article.

1. Similar examples in pipe organ history are addressed in chapter III, "Steam Power" in Laurence Elvin's *Organ Blowing* (London: the author, 1971).
2. *New York Clipper*, January 27, 1877, p. 347 and March 24, 1877, p. 416, contain the agents' ads to sell the former Barnum organ wagon.
3. *New York Clipper*, April 5, 1873, p. 4.
4. Circus World Museum.
5. American Antiquarian Society.
6. Henry E. Bowser Diary, Fred D. Pfening III collection.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. *Detroit Free Press*, August 25, 1882.
10. *New York Clipper*, February 4, 1882, p. 755.
11. *New York Clipper*, August 26, 1882, p. 366.
12. *Detroit Free Press*, September 17, 1882, courtesy John Polacsek.
13. Ad in *New York Clipper*, November 4, 1882, p. 542.
14. Charles E. Hewitt, *A Backward Glance*, (Brunswick: Brunswick Publishing Company, 1976), n.p. The book incorrectly identified the series as Irwin Bros. They were probably taken during the 1890 or 1892 dates at Bath.
15. Circus World Museum.
16. Minnesota Historical Society; Circus World Museum.
17. This Glasier negative is at the Ringling Museum of the Circus.
18. Minnesota Historical Society.
19. Albert Conover now owns the Ralph Miller negatives.

Correction:

Joe Bradbury kindly pointed out that the second Mugivan and Bowers show of 1913 was Howes Great London, not Famous Robinson, as noted in the history of the Great Wallace Clown Ticket Wagon in the last issue. The author referred to Mugivan's 1921 interview with Frank Braden of the *Billboard*, republished in the March-April 1961 *Bandwagon*, which indicates the 1913 show titles were Howes and Robinson. The Robinson title was not actually used until October 1913, when it replaced the Great Sanger title. Mugivan and Bowers acquired the Famous Robinson in title only, as the physical equipment of that show had been sold piecemeal at auction on November 24, 1911 at Indianapolis. Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

Cole Bros. Circus

the 1951 Season and Finale

A Supplement

by Joseph T. Bradbury

It is *Bandwagon's* policy to present new information and/or illustrations that may come in following the publication of the original article. Such is the case here. In the article, "Cole Bros. Circus, The 1951 Season and Finale," which was printed in the November-December 1981 *Bandwagon* there were a number of unanswered questions for which we sought answers. Fortunately, since the article appeared information has come in to answer some of them. Additional data concerning the disposition of the Cole Bros. equipment also has turned up.

In the original article the route by which the Cole Bros. sea lion den No. 19 came to the Kiddieland Circus Zoo in Vincennes, Indiana was not known. The den had last been on Cole Bros. in 1948. It did not tour with the show in either 1949 nor 1950 and it was speculated that No. 19 got to Vincennes either by direct route from the former Louisville quarters or from Zack Terrell's farm near Owensboro, Ky. where a number of wagons were parked. Now, thanks to CHS member

William Millsap of Robinson, Ill. we have this matter cleared up. Millsap writes,

"I used to take my son to John's Kiddieland in Vincennes, Ind. where Cole Bros. No. 19 sea lion den was displayed in the early 1960's. The Kiddieland owner's wife told me that her husband had purchased the wagon at Louisville, Ky. and had pulled it to Vincennes behind a pick-up truck. She recalled the noise it made coming across the old Ohio River bridge at Louisville."

With this information we can now say with certainty that No. 19 sea lion den went directly from Louisville to Vincennes.

Columbia Tableau

We neglected to mention in the

Photo No. 2 — Former Cole Bros. No. 91, stake and chain wagon, with Hagenbeck-Wallace lettering (for Peru, Ind. Circus Festival purposes only) is currently owned by the *Peru Daily Tribune*. Note the wagon has a different paint and decorative scheme from that shown in Photo No. 1. Date is early 1960's. Pfening Archives.



Photo No. 7 — Cole Bros. sea lion den No. 19 on the show in 1948. Milt Herriott is standing in front of the cage. After the 1948 season it was stored at the Louisville, Ky. quarters until sold to John's Kiddieland in Vincennes, Ind. Pfening Archives.

original article that CHS member William R. Brinley of Meriden, Conn. initially purchased the Columbia tableau wagon from Cole Bros. in 1952 and sold it to John Kelly about two years later. It became the first wagon in the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wis., Collection.

Brinley tells this interesting story about his relationship with the Cole Bros. Circus of 1950 and his later acquisition of the Columbia tableau.

"In 1950 during the Cole Bros. Chicago date I carved a miniature Hopalong Cassidy and Topper (his horse) to lead the spec of my model circus. It was taken to Chicago by Bob Ensworth and Joe Bumberg (to see if my show could be used for promotion) to Bob Stablier and Bill (Hopalong) Boyd. It was successful and we were the only company that did not pay a royalty to them, the idea being we sold nothing, only promoted for Cole Bros. and Hopalong.

"When Cole Bros. arrived in New York City and Brooklyn, Bumberg and Ensworth had a piece of the promotion and redesigned the window cards. My miniature circus was in Saks Fifth Avenue for the New York and Brooklyn dates. They lined up many radio and T.V. spots for me and Cole Bros. I was on the Ed Sullivan Show with the Wen Hi Troupe and also on the John Cameron Swazey news with Terrell Jacobs, plus several other T.V. and radio interviews.

"We moved on to Philadelphia, my miniature show going to Wanamakers





Photo No. 5 — Former Cole Bros. No. 73, wardrobe wagon, with Sells-Floto lettering is being pulled by a four horse hitch in the Peru, Ind. Circus Festival parade about 1961. The wagon is currently owned by Phil Parsons. Pfening Archives.

the week before and during the Philly date.

"I got to know a lot of the Cole people, including Tom King and Bill Horstman and after the show closed, I relettered my show "Hopalong Cassidy Circus" and continued exhibiting in department stores. After Cole Bros. closed for good I contacted Bill Horstman and bought the Columbia Tableau and had it for about two years before I sold it to John Kelly. Later on I tried to buy two Cole cages with the former Christy Bros. skyboards, but Frank Wise who was in charge of the show's Peru quarters wouldn't sell them to me. I had some thoughts about putting out a show with Tony Alverado, a wire walker I knew.

"I saw the Columbia Tableau several times during the final 1950 tour and did not approve of the color scheme. For at least five or six years the wagon had all of those gaudy colors and I think Cole had a deal with Nu-Enamel, a Chicago paint company, to supply paint for the show. The last season (1950) the wagon even had pink on the blue wheels, along with the other gaudy carvings. Had I ever put Columbia into actual use I planned to paint it red with silver carvings.

"John Kelly contacted me soon after I bought the Columbia, offering me a profit above what I paid for it. Later when I saw what it would cost to bring the wagon to my home in Connecticut and with the proposed show with Tony Alverado falling through I sold it to John Kelly who came after it with a flat bed trailer. It became the first large wagon for the Baraboo Museum. I told Kelly I wouldn't sell the wagon to anyone but him, and for the price I had paid for it, so it could go to the newly planned Baraboo Museum.

"I still have the letter and bill of sale for my purchase of Columbia on a Cole Bros. letterhead, framed and hanging in my den, where it gives me many happy memories."

Cole Bros. No. 91 Baggage Wagon

CHS member Karl H. Hartisch of Peru, Ind. advises that we neglected in the original article to mention there is another ex-Cole Bros. wagon, in good condition, located in Peru and is used in the Circus Festival parade held each year in that city. It is No. 91, former stake and chain wagon. The wagon is owned by the *Peru Daily Tribune* and is housed in a building downtown. It bears the title of Hagenbeck-Wallace for sake of use in the festival activities, such as the other ex-Cole wagon, No. 73, wardrobe, owned by Phil Parsons, is titled Sells-Floto. Hartisch says that both of these wagons came from the Paul Kelly

Photo No. 1 — Former Cole Bros. No. 91, stake and chain wagon, with Hagenbeck-Wallace lettering, is shown in the annual Peru, Ind. Circus Festival Parade. It is being pulled by a farm tractor, not shown. Date is about 1960. Pfening Archives.



Photo No. 6 — The Columbia tableau is shown in the Peru, Ind., quarters after the show was returned there in 1950. This view shows the condition of the wagon when purchased by Bill Brinley. Pfening Archives.

farm but passed into the hands of Frank Fisher first, a former driver on Cole Bros. and resident of Miami County (Indiana). Later they were sold to their present owners. Several photos of No. 91 wagon are printed here as well as other shots of No. 73.

Hartisch continued by calling attention to Photo No. 18 at the top of page 12 of the November-December 1981 *Bandwagon* which carried the original Cole Bros. 1951 season and finale article. The photo pictures Cole Bros.' old No. 73 baggage wagon parked on the Zack Terrell farm near Owensboro, Ky. dated probably in the 1960's. He writes as follows,

"An old friend of mine in Evansville, circus fan and model builder, Mr. Bill Low, once journeyed to the Terrell farm. Zack had passed on and his widow remarried. No one was at the farm except an old caretaker. He wasn't to admit anyone but old Bill with his winning ways got on the grounds. He sent me a picture of two wagons plus an old stage coach sitting alongside a barn. Bill was told that the wagon in Photo 18, Cole No. 73 (older wagon with that number not to be confused with the newer No. 73 currently at Peru), also had some of the show's records in it that had to be held for ten years as per government regulations or other reasons. In later years I learned the wagon rotted through and field mice got into it and shredded the records to confetti for nest making. The wagons were eventually disposed of."

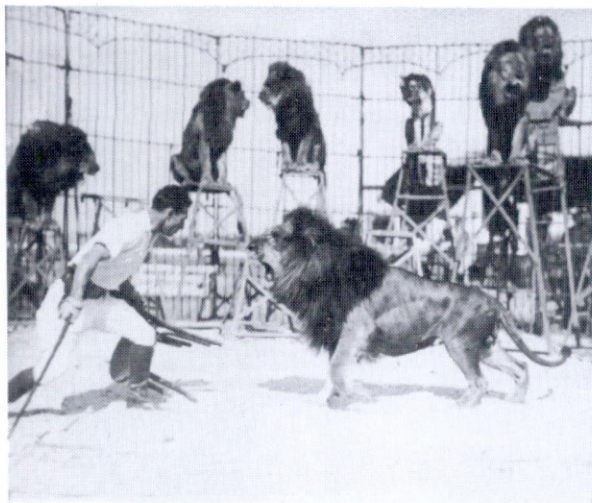
Hartisch so rightly regrets the destruction of the show's records and says, "wouldn't you have loved to have gone through that material?" By all means, and what a loss to circus historians, that the field mice got the final look at the Cole show records.

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